
POETRY | FALL 2021

A Message From the Vagus Nerve

By E.B. Fouts-Palmer

*“[. . .] visceral pain or distention of a hollow viscus [. . .] may produce reflex bradycardia and hypotension.” – Barash et al. *Clinical Anesthesia*¹.*

This is a test of the emergency system!

Food intake has been abnormally low for twelve hours,
sleep was interrupted three times last night,
and it's been awfully hot in here lately.

All of this means stress.
I cannot stress how important it is
to slow down.
Slow down.
Slow.
Digest. Rest. Wait.

Whatever you were thinking about,
whatever hurt you:
blood flow to all of your worries can wait.
Wait.
Slow down.

Be a frog in winter:
clammy skin blanketed in leaves of frozen mud.

Listen:
If you bury one ear in the snow,
you can just hear a heartbeat.

¹ Barash, Paul, et al., editors. *Clinical Anesthesia*. 6th ed., Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2009, p. 222.

E.B. Fouts-Palmer (she/her) is an anesthesiologist at Weill Cornell Medicine in New York, NY who has always enjoyed poetry, but has been writing more during the COVID-19 pandemic. She counts herself lucky to have a sunny space to write in a Manhattan apartment with a supportive husband, a lazy gray cat, and a view of trees and water. You can find her wearing binoculars and searching for birds in parks throughout New York City or on Twitter @DrFoutsPalmer. This is the first time her poetry has been published.