

Always Incomplete

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Taxol causes neuropathy. It's one thing to be told something exists, another to *feel* that something existing. I think about desire next to *experience*. I think of force next to *experience*. All the words we string together, always unable. In late January, my fingers began to throb. By February the burns & stings crawled up my forearms. By early March, a lowered dose. By mid-March, the oncologist suggested skipping an infusion. By late March, M, the PA, stood just inside the curtain of my infusion area saying, *Your choice. We can't lower the dose anymore. We either stop the treatment now or you finish this last one. Many times the neuropathy goes away. Sometimes it's permanent.* Her hands slid in & out of her pockets. I notice hands now. The choices in cancer treatment continue to catch me off guard. Stop the pain or risk cancer coming back. Choice guarantees nothing. A fight is a fight just with choice thrown in. Four months later, I wake around 3 AM, hands searing. The website tells me damaged nerves try to repair themselves. Axons. Axons: the elongated portion of the neurons. All tendril tendril. All looking for touch. Axons shrink. Axons rest. For about a month. One day, these axons begin to regenerate. One millimeter per day. Equivalent to 1,000 micrometers, or 5/127 of an inch. Just over an inch per month. I imagine my axons, feet up on the couch, slurping raspberry slushies. The website tells me the extent of recovery for nerve fibers varies. Regardless of recovery, the nerve fibers will always be incomplete. My phone screen lights up my face in the dark. I think about incompleteness. How I turn to my body as the place to contemplate gaps, as gap. How removal or what goes missing comprises only portions of incomplete. I think how treatment

feels like asking to kill my nerves so cancer doesn't kill me.
Something horrid murmurs in the unknowing. Choices feeling
like zero-sum games. Then I close my eyes. I imagine the slushy-
sucking axons on the couch, wondering what's worth the fight.
Dear nerve fibers, I get it. I chose to damage you. Behind eyelids, I
see forms nestled between soma & terminals, expand. *Let us grow.*
If unable, I still believe in you. Something lovely murmurs in the
unknowing. Axon after axon gathers energy, stretches, seedling-
esque—even then, what guarantee beyond belief—beyond nuclei.

