

EMILY ROSE COLE

*Unblues #2*

This ain't a blues to woo your baby back with,  
it ain't a slow-croon blues, a stagelights-in-your-eyes,  
quillfeathers-in-your-throat kinda blues, no, this ain't a blues  
produced for clout, for views. It's a stationary blues, a flop-  
down, head-lolled, eyes-smearred-with-last-night's-crusty-  
shadows sorta blues. This blues don't know how to walk  
straight; this crooked-footed blues lets its socks lisp, largo,  
across the carpet. This blues celebrates nothing, feeds itself  
too many macaroons. It rests too long. This blues forgets  
how to wail. How'd'you undo a blues like that? A blues  
that won't be sung through, a blues refusing to lift until  
it lifts. Ain't a thing to do but love you through it, blues.  
Ain't that the truest blues, the bluest truth.

## *The Miss Sally Sonnets*

i.

When my neurologist gave me the news,  
I wanted to swing it like a racket,  
yenned to jazz it, funk it, squall it out blues-  
style. I pined for a screenprinted jacket

like Rizzo wore in *Grease* to proclaim her  
awesome badness—*MS* curlicued in  
black, *Sick Lady*—but I chose a tamer  
tack: I made Miss Sally. She's a student,

a crow-eyed co-ed coaxing me to drink  
the liquor that my body can't afford.  
Shapeshifter, some days she's a crone who pinks  
my cheeks with pinches, fusses when I hoard

my bladder pills. In all her forms, the same  
exhaustion. Sally is my mother's name.

ii.

Was. Sally *was* my mother's name. (Cancer.  
It's been ten years and still I botch the tense.)  
Miss Sally doesn't need my mother's voice;  
on its own, her name inflames the tender

ulcer I once called daughter-love. She's mum  
most days, but when she speaks, I bend her way,  
unquenched violet that I am. Miss Sally  
sways her shoulders back—today she's a bomb-

shell with a body—and scolds my chronic  
slouch, rolls a lemon drop behind her teeth.  
She bubbles *work it, girl!* while I deep-breathe  
through downward dog, trills *who cares if you're sick?*

Tomorrow, when she turns, when my near-health  
fails, she'll sneer: *bitch, you brought this on yourself.*

iii.

*Bitch, you brought this on yourself.* Once again,  
Miss Sally's blame reverberates — she bells  
my blood with knife-tongued song: *I see you when  
you sin. That junk you eat — your belly swells*

*with sugar. What an unclean life you live:  
bad energy and a perilous lack  
of shame. Small wonder that your brain's a sieve.  
I bet it's marked up from demons cracking*

*their jaws on your gray matter. You deserve  
all you get.* She collapses me in bed;  
I can't dissent over my screeching nerves.  
I think of an anemone spreading

its tentacles. Did the clownfish despise  
those stings before adapting to survive?

*In the midst of the outbreak, I think of my mother*

who told me once that we discuss the weather with our neighbors because it's one of the few topics that affect everyone. *We share the weather*, she said. *We experience it together*. Which is why I remember so clearly the day that the seam of a cloudburst fell precisely in the middle of our street. Harvey, in his galoshes, hoisting aloft his black bumbershoot, waved to us from his porch — *how's the weather, neighbor?* I marveled, not just at our abundance of sun, but at the immutable proof that every storm ends somewhere. Each cell can spread only so far before losing its taste for destruction. But my mother wasn't wrong: we shared that storm, the same as any other. It was only luck that kept us dry.

*In the midst of the outbreak, I develop a burial plan*

and hours cycle through to clicks: endless catalogues, photos of a field in Pennsylvania that could one day open its vast belly to my soft-knuckled corpse. What a gift to specify which perennials to seed into my spoiling skin—cornflowers, columbines, tiger lilies—instead of skimming another CNN article calculating the chances of my destruction.

On another screen, two men tilt at each other with thick repudiations, trying to unseat one another before the next word from somebody's sponsor. Each day feels as thin as a communion wafer, my concentration a delicate, tearable lace. Perhaps a shroud instead of a pine box.

If I have learned nothing else this year, it is that entropy's long rictus gleams through no matter how many barriers separate a body from its descent. Let me go, unguarded, into the sheltering earth, so that something good may grow.

*Spell for Patience*

If there is clamor, let there  
be clamor. If solitude, set loose  
your breath. You cannot know  
whether the future will come  
barreling like a baying hound  
bereft too long of its keeper —  
only that it will arrive endlessly,  
without your permission. So, too,  
will the seeds blink open  
their unspoiled eyes and love  
the dark. Dearheart, trust  
this depletion. You are not  
barren; only fallow, for a time.