

Call It by its Name

by Laura Warner

1

The doctor's face: blank as ibuprofen –
and that tiny tune the foil plays when you peel it back to push the tablet out –
that is the pitch at which she controls this conversation.

When she says *benign cyst*, she almost whispers it.
I ask her to call it by its name. I say *endometriosis* –
the slow, heavy humping of it.

She will not move her lips and jaws around it.

I am scrunching pill packets in my palm –
this is the white noise of my uterus.

2

My body records sounds and plays them back to me cat fights under streetlamps claws on car bonnet fur torn from throat wail my body records these sounds mid-cycle it plays them in my abdomen so low they may be playing in my legs I cannot hear any distinction my body remembers the first time I dragged a horsehair bow across the thinnest string of a borrowed violin it plays it on repeat a finger's breadth below my right hip bone before while and after I ovulate my body records the sound of paper tearing the gynaecologist's letter ripped top to bottom played deep inside my uterus when I'm entered from behind torn smaller and smaller until the last cramps of orgasm settle in my pelvis my body remembers the school fire bell it rings my ribcage from evenings through nights hidden parts of me need to bleed but the blood can find no way out scream-pitch the volume makes me retch.

3

I'm asking the doctor what we do about it,
she is putting her finger to her lips,
pushing another blister pack across the white desk.

My body records sounds and plays them to me –

a fast train passes through a station –
a small child is straddling the yellow line
her fingers are pressed into her ears – I'm asking the doctor

to call it by its name,
and she is offering me this:

some people call it a chocolate cyst.

4

The doctor and I both know that chocolate melts in silence

5

Dear Doctor

My body's soundscape:

- a. is junk orchestra
- b. is not single clean bell
- c. is endometriosis
- d. is cacophonous

6

Listen

and get your mouth around the word.
Call it by its name.

Laura Warner is a poet and PhD student based in the Wellcome Centre for the Cultures and Environments of Health at the University of Exeter in the United Kingdom. Her research project, Uterine Poetics, explores lived experience of endometriosis through poetry and poetic approaches.

In this poem, the speaker feels that her experience of ovarian endometriosis is trivialized by her doctor's use of the medical metaphor 'chocolate cyst'. Laura wrote this poem because she believes that the language of sexual and reproductive health is often felt to be disempowering and obstructive by people who live with conditions such as endometriosis. For the author, it is poetic language and particularly poetic metaphor that can challenge and respond to language that disempowers by bringing it into focus, scrutinizing it, and then offering limitless possibilities to reimagine it on one's own terms.