

Notes from a Sickbed

Tessa Brunton

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Tessa Brunton shares her experiences living with myalgic encephalomyelitis, also known as chronic fatigue syndrome, in her graphic memoir *Notes from a Sickbed*.

Myalgic encephalomyelitis is a little-understood disease that produces muscle pain and fatigue, and thus limits physical activity. There's no cure and little in the way of treatment. Brunton, who was once in the throes of the illness, shows how she coped with a life of isolation, restricted activity, and constant trade-offs between physical exertion and the inevitable consequences that followed. Her book includes heartbreaking observations, as when Brunton tells her mother she feels she's living "in a little boat now, and it's sinking. / And all I can do is bail it out."

Although there are references to medical visits and experiments with health powders and supplements, the book isn't so much about medical treatment as it is about the illness's psychological impact. A rich imagination and sense of humor help Brunton to cope with her condition. Her fun, inventive art contributes to and enhances her narrative well. When Brunton reveals a fantasy of haunting the living like a ghost, for example, a fake publication offers advice on "The freakiest footsteps for midnight haunting!" A more casual notes page mentions the three-year-old neighbor nicknamed "Satan's mallet." Detailed drawings reveal dream houses and imaginary bedmobiles, as well as Brunton's daily struggles.

Notes from a Sickbed is a sympathetic, inspiring graphic memoir account of grappling with an illness.

PETER DABBENE (September / October 2022)

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