Recommended Treatment

by Maggie Jones

Reflex neurovascular dystrophy, amplified pain, short circuits in the spinal cord, lactic acid, abnormal reflex: my bones hurt. The pain is in my body, not my head, so why do I need counseling? Intensive physical therapy and psychological evaluation. The goal: desensitization. But to what? To the briars pulling at my skin, the sting of the honeybee, the splinter in my thigh from the dry log?

When I tripped over the oak’s roots, the pain surged through my knee into my thigh, my hip, my chest, and I couldn’t breathe. It pulsed through my body for weeks, though the crescent moon scrape on my knee healed in three days. That word—desensitized—echoes in the invisible cobwebs caught on my face, the milky dew clinging to the fern, the singe left by the stinging nettle, the cool relief of the jewelweed. I want to feel the December wind on the nape of my neck, the cottonwood seeds that tease my nose, the itch left by the mosquito on my bare leg, the beechnut that bounces off of my shoulder on its way to the forest floor. If I lose the pain, what else disappears with it? Desensitized—the word echoes through the trees.