

## My house is not my home

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Rate your pain on a scale of 1 to 10,  
I get asked monthly.  
20 is always my answer.  
It is a headache, multiplied.

But how do I explain migraines without hurting you?

My head is a house, and migraines are unwanted flowers,  
Grown from seeds that I never planted.  
Infiltrating my skull,  
Their roots have intertwined with  
Every nerve, every synapse,  
Until I cannot see, I cannot hear, I cannot think.

When I explain it like that, people do not understand me.  
After all, it's just a headache.  
Oh, there are pills, they tell me.  
Take Advil or Ibuprofen,  
You will feel better then, it's not that bad.  
But have you felt it?

Botox is 30 shots every 3 months, I've had it.  
There are MRIs, MRAs, and MRVs, I know it.  
I don't have enough fingers to count the medications:  
Naproxen, Topamax, Depakote,  
Propranolol, Sumatriptan,  
Metoclopramide, do I keep going?

I have always thought of myself as a superhero

With the worst ability:  
Migraines have made all of my senses  
Hyper acute.

I am the exact opposite of a deaf man,  
I can hear every single thing.  
I have asked teachers to turn off lights  
For me, they steal my eyesight.

I try to explain migraines like this to other people.  
Still, I am confronted with  
“I don’t think it’s that bright,”  
“I don’t think it’s that loud,”  
“Well, now I feel badly.”  
I didn’t realize  
We were talking about you.

I ask again:  
How do I explain migraines without hurting you?

Close your eyes.  
Imagine an ice pick.  
The sharp pointed metal,  
Ready to break  
And ruin.

Now imagine  
It strikes your head,  
Once, twice, and once more,  
Chipping away at your soul.

Your eyes shut tightly.  
You fall to your knees in shock.  
Your hands fly up to protect yourself.  
The pain reverberates in your body  
Like a stone thrown into a pond.

You cannot think of anything  
Besides the pain.  
You cannot remember who you were  
Before it started.

It swells

And consumes your entire being.  
You are poisoned,  
You are numb,  
You are burning,  
You are dying.

You are held captive  
Inside your own mind.

Now catch your breath,  
And open your eyes.

Were you being strangled  
By the flowers?

My head is a house that I cannot call my home,  
Because I was never invited inside.

## **Background**

Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine (OUWB) offers medical students the opportunity to participate in the OUWB-Hispanic and Newcomer Outreach Mentoring Program, where medical students are paired with kids from the neighboring city of Pontiac, Michigan. The program aims to educate and empower kids to make healthy decisions and improve medical students' communication skills. Although the kids are typically randomly matched with medical students, Damaris was specifically paired with Amanda due to their shared diagnosis of chronic migraine with aura.

According to the Migraine Research Foundation, migraine is the third most prevalent illness and the sixth most disabling disorder worldwide. However, its complex and poorly understood etiology often leaves both physicians and patients frustrated. Throughout the program, Amanda and Damaris bonded over their shared experiences, notably, how challenging it is to explain to others what a migraine feels like. Therefore, they crafted this poem in order to help others understand the disorder.

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