

## THE RESEARCH SUBJECT

*Suzanne Edison, MFA*

### I.

Cradled in sanitized air, tethered  
to a pole and a bag that's dripping  
an elixir in rhythmic blips.

Dreaming of side effects this drug might elicit—  
fever, flush of skin, risk  
of infection...rejection—a love

for what's unknown, like the stranger I bump  
in a crowd, then meet again at a party.

I bite and lick my lips as my blood,  
faith, and stamina are tested.

### II.

Tested, I am subject and predicate. I am numbers  
on paper, reported and repurposed.  
Female. Color me a bleached moon-snail shell

lying on a graveyard of 'bad blood,' the husks  
of black, Tuskegee men with syphilis, tricked  
into sacrificing their lives. Given no diagnosis,  
no treatment.

And Henrietta Lacks, immortalized  
by her raging cancer cells, taken  
and sold for profit without her knowledge.

I know my rights. I can read.  
No one can touch me unless I agree.

### III.

Agreeing, I am consented.  
Consensual, my body is shadowboxing;  
it agrees to disagree with itself,  
not like lovers after a quarrel,  
more than apologies are needed...

I want a sign, a change, my name  
on the consent forms, want to be  
the magma and rock of possibility...yes,

if not healed, at least  
to be useful.

### IV.

Useful, used, and schooled  
to ask questions, I have this itching

to know what's infusing my veins:

is it the breakthrough, spinning  
a spider's armature, or placebo,  
a dud, a slug's slime trail?

But I must be blind.

### V.

Double blind. Trials are trails doctors dream up.  
Explorers slicing through colorless jungles of data.

I follow in hues of dusk: striated gold  
scrimping through evergreens outside  
the hospital window, as infusion drops

caught in dilutions of light, shape-shift, fade  
to grey like a lover's face after the affair.

I'm flushed and weary with hope, like a salmon  
returning to spawn. But my blood

summoned back to the heart, sluices on,  
seeking its reunion with air.

*Suzanne Edison writes most often about the intersection of illness, healing, medicine and art. Her chapbook, The Moth Eaten World, was published by Finishing Line Press. She is a board member of the Cure JM Foundation and teaches writing workshops at Seattle Children's Hospital and the Richard Hugo House in Seattle.*