

Doctors Define Empathy as a Muscle

1.

Muscles, derived
from the Latin word *musculus*,
or “little mouse”,
contracting them looks
like mice moving under the skin.

2.

Empathy can be grown and flexed,
one needs only to see
that others might not live
the same way, and what is more,
not expect them to.

3.

Removing expectation
is a tenant to happiness.

4.

All of life is an exchange
of energy. The friction
of our bodies, the vibration
of our words born
at the throat, landing buoyed,
afloat in the canals of listening.
What is it you bring?

5.

A hard thing, to explain
to a child that she cannot
keep the newborn, orphaned
mice she found behind
the shed—tiny
velvet tufts with eyes
still winked shut—
even they couldn't see
how vulnerable they were.

6.

Is it difficult to be you?

7.

Too much strain and the soft
tissue pulls free as an
arrow from its bow,
or constricts, bound
and knotted. A point of pain.

8.

My son asks, why didn't
Thetis just dip Achilles
by his hair in the River Styx?

9.

If God is love,
how many does it take
to love all of us?

10.

Within an hour, nature had
consumed those abandoned
mice, secretly as lips
sealed with a zippering
finger.

11.

Reading fiction
is an exercise in empathy,
thereby poetry
rewires the heart—
hooked, lined, and sunk.

12.

Every word matters as much
as the sun to the seed,
the moon to a tide,
the mind
to the body's motioning.