

CHRISTINA GOMBAR

IN THE COMPANY OF GHOSTS

I am a ghost. You may have seen me in the supermarket, on a park bench, standing in line next to you at the library. I walk beside you. But I am not really in the world.

I am still on the organizational chart at the company where I used to work, but someone else sits at my desk. My name still appears in the address books of friends, though most no longer call. If I publish an article, lawyers advise, I must use a pseudonym and refuse payment, though my financial situation is dire. Occasionally, a van with tinted windows parks across the street and runs a camera on my house, or trails me to the supermarket and reports back to my employer. But most of the time I am invisible.

They say that ghosts wreak havoc because the spirits don't understand that they are dead. This is how I feel. I have had some version of Chronic Fatigue and Immune Dysfunction Syndrome, or CFIDS since I was 31, but it wasn't until three years ago, when I was 39, that it caused me to drop out of the world—leave my job, shut down my social life, put all plans for the future on hold, change from living as one type of being to living as another entirely.

When that devastating attack came, I didn't quite understand what had happened. Like a spirit with unfinished business, I continued to knock around, angrily attempting to do the normal things, insisting on my right to be in the world. Remembering those first months, I have an image of a headless horseman, wandering the aisles of the supermarket, furious that they'd rearranged the shelves, were hiding things from me, wondering when someone had broken into my car and changed the control panel, why the world suddenly moved up ten speeds.

In my case, the overwhelming and most incapacitating symptom of

