THE NERVOUS SYSTEM GRIMOIRE

Spells for Dysautonomia



The Book Club Guide

River Marshall

Welcome, reader.

Whether you are meeting in a cozy living room over cups of herbal tea, gathering via a low-spoon video call, or turning these pages alone in the quiet sanctuary of your own room, this guide is an invitation. The Nervous System Grimoire wasn't written to be memorized or rushed through. It was written to be lived, adapted, and shared.

Chronic illness and dysautonomia often isolate us by design. Gathering together, even across screens or within the quiet architecture of spoon-theory boundaries, is its own form of medicine. Use these discussion prompts, rituals, and gentle frameworks to guide your conversations, unpack your shared stories, and meet your bodies right where they are.



How To Use This Guide

Honor Your Capacity: You do not have to answer every question or finish every prompt in one sitting. If your group needs to pause, lie down on the floor with legs up on a couch, or shift into companionable silence, do it. That is the practice.

Ditch Productivity Culture: There are no wrong answers here, and no grades for finishing the book. Allow the conversation to wander where your bodies need it to go.

Adapt the Container: If standard book club settings (loud restaurants, rigid schedules, bright evening meetings) drain your spoons, adapt the format. Host an asynchronous text thread discussion, a pajama-and-tea gathering, or break the questions up over multiple weeks. This is YOUR space. Shape it to fit your bodies.



Opening Ritual: Settling Into The Room

Before diving into the questions, if it feels supportive, take two minutes of absolute silence together. If you'd like to, place a hand over your heart or on your belly. Notice your breath. Feel free to acknowledge whatever state your nervous system arrived with in this moment, whether you're running on high alert, dragging from post-exertional malaise, or feeling cautiously steady. Whatever is alive in you today, you are welcome here exactly as you are.



Part 1: The Foundations & The Mechanics of the Veil

THEME: Deconstructing Labels

The grimoire suggests that many of our diagnoses explain parts of our experience but rarely the whole picture.

- How has collecting (or struggling to collect) medical labels shaped your relationship with your body?
- Have you ever felt relief at a diagnosis, even if it didn't come with a cure? What did that naming give you? Or did you feel like you lost something?
- Are there parts of your experience that still don't have a name? How do you hold those unnamed pieces and practice sitting with the mystery?

THEME: Body Language

River writes that your body isn't broken; it's speaking a language conventional medicine hasn't learned to hear.

- What is your body's most frequent vocabulary right now? (e.g., fatigue, hypervigilance, digestive fire, joint looseness, racing heart, sudden crashes)

- When did you first start learning to LISTEN to your body, instead of just trying to override it?
- What's one thing your body has been trying to tell you that you've been ignoring?

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Part 2: Flare Days & Energetic Conservation

THEME: The Myth of the Baseline

In a world that demands a flat line of consistent productivity, chronically ill people often move in ebbs and flows. How do you personally define your "baseline" and what does your current spoon drawer look like?

- Does your baseline shift seasonally, hormonally, or based on external stressors?
- How does your relationship with rest change when you stop viewing it as a reward and start viewing it as a biological necessity?

THEME: The Salt Ward & Low-Spoon Triage

Part 2 offers immediate, low-spoon interventions for acute flares–salt-loading, vagal nerve anchors, histamine banishing, etc.

- Which ritual or physical adjustment has felt most accessible or surprising to your system?
- Have you discovered any low-spoon interventions NOT in the book that work for your body? Share them with the group.

THEME: Radical Rest vs. Collapse

Discuss The Void, the chapter on true, guilt-free rest.

- What makes radical rest so difficult for chronically ill bodies to access?
- What stories or external pressures do we have to unlearn to let ourselves drop into rest without shame?
- Have you ever experienced the difference between "forced collapse" and "chosen rest"? What did that feel like?

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Part 3: Maintenance, Resilience & Reweaving

THEME: The Trifecta and Overlapping Terrains

Whether navigating POTS, MCAS, hypermobility, or overlapping immune patterns, how have you experienced the interconnectedness of your symptoms?

- Have you found providers who look at the whole web, or have you had to map it yourself?
- What's one pattern you've noticed in your body that no practitioner has named?

THEME: Mobility and Permission

In the chapter on mobility spells, the grimoire discusses choosing mobility aids–canes, wheelchairs, braces–before becoming desperate, reframing them as tools of freedom rather than surrender.

- What complicated feelings or grief surround mobility aids or accommodations in your life?
- Have you ever resisted using a tool that would have helped you? What changed (or hasn't changed yet)?
- How do you navigate ableism, both external and internalized, when it comes to asking for what your body needs?

THEME: Reweaving Vigilance

A body under chronic siege teaches the nervous system deep hypervigilance.

- What does a "slow re-weaving" look like for you?

- How do you practice building safety in micro-doses – one breath, one moment, one safe space at a time?
- What helps your nervous system remember that it's allowed to rest, even if the danger isn't fully gone?

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Closing Ritual: Laying Down the Burden

To close your time together, take turns naming one thing you are giving yourself permission to stop fighting, stop fixing, or stop apologizing for this week. Once everyone has spoken (or passed in comfortable silence), take a collective deep breath, exhale slowly through pursed lips, and let the container rest.

"Healing, then, isn't a destination, but a practice. And in the messy middle of it all, there's stability. A life worth living exists, even in a body that doesn't work the same way it did before."
– River Marshall