REMAIN SEATED: A COLLECTION OF POETRY

by

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For Bro—

These are our photographs.

Love you.
Acknowledgements


“Stuff My Non-Verbal Brother Says” and “Childless, Hormonal College Girls at a Baby Shower” were published in Breath & Shadow Winter 2017.
Abstract

This is a collection of neo-confessional poetry concerning how place memory, disability, anxiety, and family affect the life of a twenty-something woman with Cerebral Palsy.
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The Poet Asked Me What the Wheelchair Symbolized

The wheelchair is not a figure of speech.

Walking is—

unless it’s Friday

because my parents know me as a

supported biped—

but when I walk to the library after class,

I’m sitting down.

I don’t use crutches

(they are called canes),

but I use wheelchairs as a crutch,

in the writing sense

because the universal symbol

of access is a wheelchair with a head;

mind and movement without body—

confined freedom,

poetry.
Asphalt Moses

The freshman Biblical Hebrew major
laments his lacking faith
when a late-night laying of hands
leaves my unsteady gait,
derphins merely spilling to panic.

He sees uprightness
as Jesus’ most common gift,
something those with his name
should easily dispense: divine Tylenol.

My aided bipedalism strikes
lesser chords than King David—
but fills my own hands to bursting.

He forgets he’s no landowner
and I’m no Ruth. I can’t glean
sustenance from leftover wheat
in his promise paved field;
I’m carrying my Bible in my teeth.
Before Helping Children and those Around You

After ten minutes of wrestling
to open the library door unaided,
four people slowed to help.
If the world ended—
Trust me, most of us
would die.
You think you
could survive as an archer because you shot a bow
in summer camp?
And, you, apocalyptic marksman, with your reinforced barrel
chest and long-range sights
consider the upkeep:
Where would you get the bullets?
How will you keep the gun clean?
And, say you obsess enough to answer these questions.
First, weirdo.
Second, no accounting for luck.
Start with massive losses of life
And questionable statistical immunity.
We are not protagonists,
we are city-dwellers who can’t find food
in concrete-bomb blasts.
The people loot—the stores empty.

Also, I am assuming you are:
Able-Bodied.
Temporarily, of course.
Without proper sanitation systems/medical training, you will lose something, sooner or later.
Me? I’m in a wheelchair; can’t climb down stairs in ordinary building fires.
I doubt the place I’ll be if the world ends is accessible, because no regular place is ever.
The common adage Secure your own mask first. does not fill me to the brim with hope of human kindness.
Don’t say, “I’d help you.”
I can’t hunt or gather or fight or scrounge; I can be—
What? The keeper of lost myth and culture?
I’m sure the seven types of argument, badly written French philosophy and two Emily Dickinson verses I’ve memorized’ll come in real fucking handy when we face roving bandits.
End times stop the clock.
Reset it to when euthanasia might become a tribal necessity.
Stop romanticizing and recall
the 6.7 billion corpses littering the landscape
and not
the Chosen Savior™.

Maybe it won’t be so bad;
maybe I, in my chair of wheels, will be immortalized
as Patient Zero, The Precipitator.
Wouldn’t that be lovely?
Fellowship

When we met at Bethesda, I’d sat poolside for 14 years. Not as long as the guy who got to *walk* into the sunset. Or maybe it was raining that noon. I don’t know; before my time. Anyway, I loved Elizabeth Ann from the jump—protestant conversion against popular wisdom and her family’s wishes. American scholar. Nun, who didn’t mind if you splashed her during rosary recitations. And, most important, her miracle wasn’t healing. She started the first free Catholic school in America instead. Why is it so hard to find saints who don’t try to replace Blue Cross with crucifixes? A preacher came by yesterday to say the lame fear walking because whole bodies give us one less thing to kvetch about. *Loss of community*, he called it. What community? Bodies proximate aren’t automatic communion if they can’t move away. We can’t. Tired of wanting without, we make do within. Complaint. Exhaustion. Guilt. Exultation, in small steps (sometimes literal, often not). Shared emotions, deeper resonances than superficial matching faults. Skinny dipping might heal me. Fear doesn’t keep me in this lounger. Or modesty. Just the knowledge I’d keep coming back—whole or not. Anyway, I hope that preacher dies like Elizabeth Ann did: in sleep, ill but un martyred.
Stuff My Non-Verbal Brother Says

Smiling “Rawrs” while looking in your direction, rising in intonation as you near

I like the noise you’re making, clanking down the hall.

Tornado siren shouts at 11:05 on a Sunday

Hurry up, Pastor, you’re running long.

Slightly coughed purr.

Ah...that tickles. I like it.

Lung capacity testing howling

I know it’s two a.m., but I’ve got something to say. LISTEN!

Face scrunched in a pruny “O,” tongue sticking though the hole

Various levels of “DO NOT LIKE!”

Tongue working away happily

This, this expensive wine you gave me a taste of on your finger, I LOVE.

Medium length question-yelps, repeating every minute or so

I’m not a potted plant, why did you leave me alone? At least turn on some music.

Darth Vader breathing

Why, oh, WHY are you wiping my face?

Punching someone in the clavicle while lying on the pull-out couch

I need leverage to see what’s going on over the back of the couch. YOU are that leverage.

Static-like chirps, breaking up your phone call home

I hear your voice! Where are you and your noise?

Cheshire toddler-smile

I know I’m cute enough to get away with whatever mischief I just did—including goosing you.

Really lecherous glances in the direction of that cheerleader who just called him “adorable”

Come a little closer, babe, and I’ll cop a feel.
Notes on “Stuff”

My parents and I edited my brother’s obituary 17 times. We kept love in present tense. “Stuff” was printed on the back of memory cards distributed at his services.
To Render Common Strange, Add “Disability”

Picture an Amusement Park.

Roller Coasters    Water Slides    Quaint Ferris Wheel    Spinning Tea Cups


Did you fill Disney World with ramped jungle gyms and school bus lifts hidden in carousels?

Or, do those feel too small scale?

I had to travel to find even these—Morgan’s Wonderland.

Playground equipment

a rare amusement

if everyone can use it.
On an Elizabethan Walt Disney

He who lengthens language
Gordians tongues,
trips and ties lips ‘til even
Steamboat Willie cannot whistle.
Eyes (Shakespeare’s
and scholars’) limp
through scansion
ears gloss natural conversation;
making scant beauty beastly.
His workaday grain
play ethic less
than deity, despite
the moonlit Skellington
nightmare soliloquies
he informed. His phallic
phrasing rapiered out
like the parroted snark
of Aladdin’s Igao on plain
stages for dirt-ached feet
and cushion boxes alike—words.
His syllabic density shields
contemporary constraint—writing
Toy Stories when people
animate plastic.
He borrowed from others
like we do him. Ah, how would he find Nemo, CGI the battles overblown only his words now light? 

*Hamlet* has fur and a roar (Romeo, too, in the sequel); popular entertainment remains.
Nightly Prayer in January

Please, no funerals.
Vox

20 lipsticks (Including Snow White Red and all Seven Dwarves in miniature)
4 four pan eyeshadow palettes (one unused)
3 blushes
2 highlighters
5 broken charging cables
2 concealers
2 foundations
1 (terrible) setting powder
30 Q-Tips
1 flashlight
4 rumbled syllabi
1 tube of mascara (rolled under bed)

Inventory a vanity;
find what a woman values.

I could have had spastic vocal cords—
speak slurring stutter slow.
Instead, I extenuate
my most typical feature.
I pack assumptions as luggage

*Your wheelchair won’t fit somewhere.*

Fit them between blue jeans

*Resources will lack as much as at home.*

needn’t tetris either in: I’m wearing the trip’s

*Maybe strangers will give good directions?*

prescribed navy slip-on watershoes.

*Wishes. Fishes. Fuck.*

I’m stuck. Historically narrow

*Maybe this doorman’ll know a way through?*

River Walk— corralled

*Bad guess. Double back.*

by crowds and bright Mexican restaurant umbrellas

*Triple back.*

into crystal energy merchants or beaded purse stalls.

*I should contact the Tourist Board;*

I’d rather veer off into

the San Antonio River’s shallows.

*disabled tourists exist!*

After a weekend, looking to empty suitcase space,

*Maybe I’ll get lucky.*

I Google: Accessible Travel, San Antonio

and find the tourist board has already color-coded a path.

*Hope—*
as I check out of the hotel.
Implications of My First Long-Term Relationship

I

used

to walk

like

this:
cane point quarter note

stagger left

cane point quarter note

drag right.

Repeat until

F

A

L

L

and catch.

I’ve

SAT

for a decade

(and change)

Now, my poems’ rarely
Swerve.

Preferring
Something
Statically
Ordered.
Looking for Life Guidance, I Google My First Name

“Rational” says the baby name guide.
Scoff; think of Spock marking accounting ledgers.

That was charity—most websites say the name’s
derived from the Greek prefix *a-* or “not” and *λυσσα* (*lyssa*)
meaning “madness” or “rabies.”

My parents just wanted to modernize their tribute to my Great Aunt Alice;
they didn’t know Cerebral Palsy meant *brain weakness*.

I am not insane,
but *disabled*.
Does a negative plus a negative equal:
Humility? or Pessimism?
as its positive?

Or just a sore ass.
Close enough.

Labelling one child as having both
a strong mind and a palsied one
presents a single contradiction:
I never know which name’s true.
Positive Staring

If you must stare at my new Widjit wheelchair,
be like the boy
excited flailing his arms to facepalming father:
loudly proclaim for all to hear,
*If I ever need a wheelchair, I want one like that!*
Or the science teacher who
gEEKed out at the innovative use
of levers; an addition to her simple
machine lesson plan.
Or the gentlemen: *Ma’am, never seen a chair like that, Ma’am.*
Or the grandmas’ passing *Oh, how neats!*
Stare with joy, and admit
DisKids get the best toys.
Mimicry

after Ross Gay

Quite accidently, I discovered I could wink
either eye after fifteen years of closing only right
simply because I glanced my reflection splayed by
facepalm while reading yet another poem mentioning
poetry; the subject chirps incessantly—
its conspicuous escuchame reminds
me every state I’ve ever lived in
claims the Northern Mocking Bird.
The Sunshine State department calls its song
both varied and repetitive which sounds
redundantly true of everything in life—
until one remembers the difference between
a hardwood hammock and a swamp is only a
foot in elevation change measured in eighths of an inch
so close to the waterline. Floridian
details read in Splenda-Southern
drawl; four years hollering
Hotty Toddy only sharpened a called-out accent.
Kudzu chokes trees in invasive Japanese
imitation as European starlings shriek Shakespeare
in messy roosts; there’s both below my Memphis windows.
Here, I become the problem, highlighting out-of-place
with elsewhere’s nature in someone else’s
voice, a borrowed snatch of something still settling;
a consequence of being born where everyone
was from somewhere else, a moment spent looking
for my glasses until I realize
exactly where they are because
I can see.
Functional independence crumbles
like the map in my purse
as I turn a corner
to a now-known sight of ivy
creeping up a chain link fence
off reading
in growing familiarity
on a worldly trellis
on my own (small)

Oh, I can do something
Less a measure of ability by universal
students and more a circuit of basically reinforced kinetic adaption

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Assumed Allegiances

Florida’s a long state—
southern Florida is too far
down for accent but warm
enough for snowbird educators:
one split my sixth grade
English class in half
Temple Beth Emet/All Saints Catholic Church
Prepping for an Auschwitz survivor’s speech
Mrs. Singer called me “Aryan;”
You’d live, Radtke.

“No. I wouldn’t’ve. Nazis calibrated
chambers on disability eugenics.”

Tennessee’s likewise stretched—
the West has Mid-Southern drawl.
So many people trace their family tree
with unraveled grey uniform wool;
I didn’t know of Florida’s Confederacy
until I happened upon a shaded map
my sixteenth summer and realized I wasn’t
just moving to Dixie—I was a native.
August, sophomore History:
I didn’t protest the Chicago-accented
We won the Civil War.
after a four-score shock,
silent enough to hear a Rebel Yell,
someone else said,

“No, Sir, WE didn’t. You did.”
How Diagnosis is not a Personality Test, or 4p- and My Brother

Your “affinity for music” has been researched, check *Pediatric Neurology* for the citation. Or, remember how a cover band, with just a kick drum, made you the happiest man alive.

Apparently, your facial structure is a “Greek helmet” instead of merely adorable. Your sleep problems are also a diagnostic.

Such things make me wonder where genetics stop and you enter the equation. Perilous, that. Too close to wondering at God.

But, you laugh when I cry (sibling rivalry remains unplundered for publication) and you are a horndog—rare when 75% of those diagnosed are girls. Oh, and you’re stiff instead of typical hypotonia. Also, naps.
**Astronauts**

"Which creature walks on four legs in the morning, two legs in the afternoon, and three legs in the evening?"

Accepted answer: Man—crawling bipedal tripod in rocket age stages.

Oedipus, do you remember your thrusters falling away in the first transition? I had a Terran decade before I could start-stop under my own engines; thirty-five steps of Sphinx-beriddling diagonal. Each growth spurt threw off my training’s physics—away from anticipated lunar landings towards the tidal sea of aided age. In youth. You, at least, met the benchmarks in blind rote. I learned how to reenter gravity’s scorch with only minor burns. Weeble Wobble days. Knocked down and fought upright in Martian simulation. You simply stood. Now: I haul upwards on a sturdy thing I’ve crawled to, like those mirror-domed diagnosis days (stiff months’ old legs can hold weight scarily soon). This morning, I sublimated lark to nightingale. Worse than nightingale: What is the category for the bechaired? The four-wheeled and two caned? The Sphinx accounts for only a single point of support. Perhaps you better distinguish life’s feather shading in your fresh self-voiding darkness, Oedipus. See—I don’t fit your countdown but I’m as trained as you.
Biology 101: Theory

Textbooks make cleanliness easy,
clearing chaos, straightforwarding

Slime, fish, monkey, man
‘til the ladder out shines.

Though remember, before you grasp the rungs:
Breeding “desirable” traits is inbreeding

(Trace: the spread of hemophilia through Europe’s royalty by intermarriage
as you drive your wheezing purebred pug to the vet again.)

Not all traits are heritable (See: Nurture, or, the reason your cousins are weirder than you)
Sickle cell is an adaptation to malaria (Read: Crane’s “A Man Said to the Universe”).

The ladder is nothing.
Evolution is not

a way out, up, or
through; it’s a way within.

Luck’s malformed siblings,
Sir Prise or Miss Fortune,
are as likely as She is—
Even in Mendel’s peas.

Evolution sharpens nature’s hindsight:
Strange and wrong to contemporaries,

efficacy judged in posterital fitness
(Recall: the beaks of Darwin’s finches).
Biology 102: Social Implications

Middle school smelled like Teen Spirit—
not the song, but Shower or Daisy Fresh
covering shy-sweat.

Sixth grade socials aren’t the place to
attain Nirvana, so they weren’t ever played.
Instead, students mating
paired off to some sway-slow
songs.

I stood, posterior walker quarantining me by the Skittles—
away from glances instinctively gauging
my (un)fitness as a partner by the palsied
asymmetry of my side-side shuffle.

Teachers rearranged others’
wandering hands to waltz positions,
noticed my guard stance by the snacks.
This would not do—
everyone needs to be entertained.
So, I, was matched with the other unattached,
a boy with behavior issues.

Standing two yards apart, we
wondered if we were suddenly contagious
and felt like zoo pandas.
What a Body Might Do

My family saw The Nutcracker every November;
I was learning to walk (and fall and
fall and fall) while seeing perfect
Fouetté turns.

I didn’t know I had a copper-lined
stomach until Clara’s pointe shoe lit
the Bunsen burner of in my gut.
Everything burned green
‘til the ache grew like the rats.

I allow a dangerous matchflare
hope: dance might trump
my diagnosing doctor.
She won’t be a ballerina.

After all, such chemistry was vital
At 6—a tutu was a talisman anchoring
my girlhood. Boyness, a mere Hot Wheel
away.

My body might shift or
grow mysterious things if
I didn’t cling to sequins,
acquire grace.
Youth’s mutability makes
bodies out of clothes;
dangerous otherness lurked
beneath blue dinosaur t-shirts
while ideals taunted with a hyper-agile future.
Not just moving, but moving well—
in a way an audience
beyond parents might admire

What might pink and practice
help a body do?
NAS Pensacola

“Look at that formation!”
The sound of jet engines always
brings back Dad’s
survived-weeks-in-a-cubicle-for-wings smile
But sitting here, watching the Blue Angels practice
from the museum parking lot, it’s hard enough
not to whine, I can’t see a thing
through his melonhead.

The Naval Aviation Museum is a landmark in
my family’s annual summer flight path—
so familiar that I can finish Dad’s
“Planes of My Life” monologue,
even several months after its last delivery:

*The Cougar*—
—is the plane you saw at nine that made you want to be a Marine Corps officer.

*Hey, a Black Hawk. Like the one*—
—you shook the house with on your 20th wedding anniversary. The neighbors were
cheesed.

*A-Star*—
—my eleventh birthday fly-by. You flew from Chicago.

Worst yet, he’s pushing my wheelchair. I can’t *not* follow
the recitation as he buzzes around, taking pictures where his pinkie balances
the suspended aircraft inside.
We go past a Desert Storm flight suit,
Dad’s attire in all my childhood memories
(except the six or seven where I picked the ties he packed for business).

He is silent,
chasing memory vapor trails I’m blind to.
Depression

You left the kettle on again.
The hiss of burning metal
the only alert to failure;
the auto-off broke with the lid
when you dropped it.

That’s what you get for buying
one without a whistle.
You’ve gotten too used to scalded
smells for them to warn either.

You didn’t do it maliciously;
You never do—
just played another hand of solitaire.
And another. Another.
You were irresponsible
And it happened.

Refill. The water boils,
Jumps now—puddles
ruinously on the counter
and drips on the floor.
Burns a careless hand.
Maybe the red welts will
remind you to take the water
off next time before the
simmering precipice.

*Pay attention! Stop sputtering!*
Likely—
It won’t
Prohibition

There are rules for this.

1) Enjoy it.

2) If it’s clear or flavored, don’t touch it.

3) When you feel ear-ache off-balance, stop.

4) No wine, too sour.

5) If it’s easy, be wary.

6) No bars.

7) Remember you’re vulnerable as hell.

8) Enjoy it.

9) Do it only when safe, near people who might help when you fall.

10) That means family.

11) Nuclear.

12) Enjoy it.

13) Avoid fallout.

14) Late in the day and straight to bed.

16) Whiskey and bourbon.

17) It’ll smell better than it tastes.

18) Half a shot. No more.

19) Enjoy it.
Reading List of Non-Existent Books I Need

Grieving Thrice: A Guide to the Diagnosis, Catastrophe, and Death of a Special Needs Child

1001 Reasons to Stay in Grad School

(Not) Trailblazing: An Anthology of Proper Representation

A Foolproof Way to Teach Citation in One Lecture

My Parents Have Hobbies and Other Obvious Nest-Emptier Realizations

SSC Campus for Complete Dolts

How To: Write Your Older Brother’s Obituary

God (Sort Of) Exists: The Agnostic Dilemma of Uncertain Afterlives

More than the Group Home: Resources for the Disabled Adult

Your Kid Might Not Walk and That’s Okay

Here’s Why You Need to Do This: Academic Inspiration and Coping Strategies

If My Body’s a Metaphor, What is My Life?

Climbing Out of the Pigeon-Hole

Five Minute Lesson Plans for the College English Classroom
Aktion T4

September 1939. Applied biology—or grasping America’s eugenic heels in Germany. Guns in doctors’ coats; all townsfolk were to see was smoke.

The program transported institutional donations to the war effort in gray buses with opaque windows. Covered building walkways. Families were sent lying ashes:

Condolences, your uncle/sister/son/mother/daughter died of (insert malady here). Really, the useless eaters fed the state instead. He calibrated gas chambers; she tested shower heads. Both wondered why no one left. The town guessed man-smoke from the clockwork. Bus. Smoke. Bus. Even kindergarten bullies knew implications; taunted “You’re going on the gray bus!”

August 1941. Machinery Dismantled. Sent to Poland.
Project Genesis
MERI, Memphis, Tennessee

The nurse stresses need for surgical training bodies—
*Disabled Bodies Preferred;*
but how does marketing to fieldtripping
adolescents lead to DNR retentions?

I was restitched by masters, owe a debt.
Mere glance to resent teaching
my body (optional consent). Must
I offer my corpse—story-stiffed but silent
for surgeons’ mortal comprehension?

*Noble gift*— the nurse effuses, pivoting
around my questions. Last chance
to help the living avoid fatally poor scalpelng.
Implied, not outright mentioned:

surgery breeds surgery proliferation.
Uncured cadavers still enable medical
miracles. The structure drips condescension.
Childless, Hormonal College Girls at a Baby Shower

*Do you want boys or girls?*

I ask, and they give the typical answer:

*Healthy* babies,

able bodies implied.

Like them.

When there aren’t kids
with sparkling smiles,
my candlewax ovaries
can be counted on to recall
the smothered baby
dolls of childhood—strangled
as I tried to hold them
and walk upright—
and the kitchen
I can’t wheelchair in.

But, lit by weapons
grade adorable,
these traitors wick away
at reason ‘til my
womb is a churning estuary
of rationalized
sentiment.

So, I compromise—
I don’t want able-bodied kids.

Couldn’t keep up with ‘em.

The other girls at me like I’ve
tipped candle to crepe paper,
burnt the living room down.
Because I might
maybe
someday
want a child like me.
Child,
I am purging myself of myself and also
half of you. Call it Catholic; I can’t help
but become Eve once a month—knowing
how hard it is to nurture orchards, yet
wanting apple pie.

I don’t pray to St. Gerard for you,
but St. Jude. I clean sheets, soak pads.
You would be a bad idea,
though emptiness swallows danger.
I can’t fill it with warnings: watching
stillbirth videos, reading about birth
defects just hollows me more.
I prove the latter’s survivability, after all.

Child, a woman looked at me today.
Said I was the right age for a family.
Is it terrible that I wasn’t?
I still live at home.
Still, she gave us hope.

But, I’ve precious little
freedom as it is. You don’t need
this maelstrom, I know.
You’re not a person, just
a symptom. Cyclical
yielding of sense.

I only want you in the week before another hope of you leaves.
To Charge a Wheelchair

Please for god’s sake remember. You hate lagging seconds behind desire. But you do not run a ‘chair like an octogenarian day-tripper. All the way across a college campus every single day. A fifty-percent load holding battery will die. In the middle of the street. Try to get to bed before 2 AM. Your ‘chair is a desk chair. and “dining room” paired with bathroom counter. Charging requires stillness. And time. Make sure the charger is plugged in. All cables necessary. Notification lights on. The pins fitted properly to the weirdly shaped holes; good light helps. The charger light turns red and the charger fan hums loudly like anxiety a white noise that is constant and makes it hard to sleep. In the morning the light should be green. You hope—after all, here are your legs.
**Perl Poem: Teacher’s Edition**

```
use strict;
#stranger small talk
/sys “Wait, you work?”
Gasps “In a wheelchair?”
*/skeptical/*/}

my answer = <sharp breath */familiar thrill/>}

if (parent) {affirm_unexpected_futures + X DISPLOC smile */hope and Hallmark/*.;}

if (polite) {confidence +‘$stale_joke’= <wheelchair_waltz_in_classroom>}

if (patronizing) {XDISPLOC tight smile */restraining punches/*.}

if (cussing) {lecture on rights + righteous_anger}

if (question_my_agenda) {“my existence is political” + smile XDISPLOC teeth}

if (educator + older) {beg for advice + earnest}

if (educator + same age) {commiserate + invite for drinks}

if (educator + disabled) {gush + revel in understanding}

exit on “Topic change.”
```
My first rosaries were plastic baby pink and red kid-proofings of faith conceived less than immaculately by some corporate uniting of China and Mardi Gras. The hollow bead seams were jagged with overages—not dangerous, but ugly with the carelessness.

Soft, they would collapse under the weight of teeth, unlike the lead paint on the antique toddler chair I teether on. Dolls soon fit better in it than I did; Snow E. White’s bouffant sat right inside the back’s cut-out heart. The rosaries tangled with saint cards in my “Someday My Prince Will Come” music box.

Once, I tied the crucifix of the red strand to Snowy’s wrist and used one of my quad cane’s for an IV pole, saying “Surgery.” when asked what I was doing. I can never remember what I was seeking, though it was largely exploratory: learning how to repeat the litanies of a body, for when life’s seams scapeled.
Hypersigil Stanzas for Anxious Magick

The first prayer I ever wrote
was first person persona
with hard end rhyme in the voice
of Jesus at Gethsemane.
The nuns saw profundity in the
sing-song of the newly confirmed.

Pentecost inspiration petered out
and I swallowed the prettiest
vial in from my cabinet to renew the burn.
I should have guessed by the label
that I had gulped a snake coil,
black steel wool twisting into
a permanent residence—
my gut—
often springing up
my throat in self-defense.

It strangles me 'til red pools
and clarity greys to
spiteful, sooted garnet;
its poison burns enough to halt
rote rosaries and quicken
desperate improvisations.
I still write prayers: sigils, now.
Take words and make them look
Strange: vowels and repeated letters
kindle a desire-phoenix,
“I will manage my time.”
becoming WLMNGYT:
sentiment lost to glyph,
sprouting indecipherable
spider-limbs at the climax.
Focus on the image.
Insure forgetfulness.
Anything to calm the serpent
enough so that I can eat.

A sigil, as used in modern chaos magick, is the practitioner’s written intention transformed into a glyph. Making something of the written intention, connected but unrecognizable, “charges” the magick and sends it into the universe. A “hypersigil,” as described by Grant Morrison in “Pop Magic,” is a longer artwork—a play, poem, painting, etc. that boosts magickal charge by weaving the creator’s intent/desire into a thought-out work, thereby transforming reality to reflect said intentions. The sigils in the above piece (from Sigilscribe.me) were created with the text of each stanza. The largest is the whole poem.
A Compliment Worth Calling Home About

Sorry, *I keep turning in handwritten work; my printer’s been broken.*

*That’s okay, your handwriting’s legible.*

My letters used to slope, tobogganing
down lined and unlined hills.
But, worse than the water-gravity
of my syllables was spacing.

To a girl who nary stood a moment unsupported,
it seemed odd that words wanted space
and didn’t cling to each other for steadying.

*My letters ran together like a foreign tongue.*
For the sake of teachers,
I was pushed towards a computer
while mantra-drilling:

*I must space this line.*
*I must space this line.*
*I. MUST. SPACE. THIS. LINE.*
until the repetition beget muscle memory.
But, now, an offhand
compliment echoes *Run, Forrest, run!:
my visible tells falling away.*
I conquered, I conform.
I can trust my words (if not my legs)
to balance on their
own.
Before You Comment on the Educational Aspects of My Writing, Consider:

The text doesn’t exist simply to enlighten you—
to particular hardships or elsewise.

It’s a translation; a self-constructed pain scale.

You should know:
I am grateful you
sat with some flattened
dimension of my life.
Gave me your eyes.

But don’t tell me
your empathy learned.
Your time’s a compliment;
any “lessons,” incidental.

I teach only in classrooms and
keep myself in the page
Denny’s Waitress to a Tourist in Homestead, Florida

It’s not a pan, but
a gun.
Okeechobee’s the trigger.
Oh, don’t get lake-eyed,
I’m just not domestic.
Never stayed upstate, either.
The capital’s up north,
that’s why the panhandle stuck—
Oh, you’re just driving down
for a fishing trip in the Keys?
How fun! Hope you don’t
have to evacuate. Gulf’s been
churning. Were you
alive for Andrew?
In his eye, I lynched a baby
doll on a stranger’s chandelier
after looting deodorant,
Maybe somebody saw that doll
when adjusting insurance claims
on the house windswept by a kindergartener
who pushed the owners to a school
or to Tennessee.
Or, it was demolished.
away. Either way,
they left. Safe and sane.
I stayed.
‘Cause it’s home.

Sorry, but I meant
to scare you.

Now, sunny-side up all right?
A Lesson in Comparative Vanity

Lucky you went to St. Louis,
the physical therapists declare
That doctor can sew!

My back, a Coach handbag.
Alterations minimal. Thread neat.

Not like hometown Miami’s whole spine exposed plaster model incision.
Stitches looser, long. Sloppy.
People clucked at an unfortunate boy’s wide scar.

Turn around, demanded parents—
whipping up my shirt. Standing me next to him.

Advertisement and report card
for parents who knew that vanity demands
the smallest scar.
Blue Curtains are Never Just Blue

I was told not to read Oscar Wilde autobiographically; but, in a class about nineteenth century sexuality, well, life shapes intent. Reading, meaning.

“To speak is to stand.”
I said amidst ramble—my defense of the method. A stance obviously wheelchaired. Glass-clear irony.

I had meant “Speak,” the Speaker of poetry—paper legs braced by spackle Truth. But, ears have no sight for page erroneous detailed typography.

Wheelchair users dream-stand unaided. Cue lucid freedom by othered normalcy’s felt language intuition. Nightly day-editing autobiography.
Jump for Joy

*It’s not jumping that’ll kill, it’s landing.*

—Dad, on parachute failure.

I spent childhood pistoning into puddles.

Push-ups on walker handles.

    Therapist binds my legs to hers,
    trains me in bending. In assuming
    our safe landings.

    Strung up like a cage spider—
    bungie cord to chastity belt.
    Tentatively trust fall in every
direction. Revel in tension-catch.

Tiny jump test. *Oh, I can land!*

    Bigger jump, and I’m an energetic
    Boher model electron.

Water is better,

no bungie bind.

    I shallow end jumping-jack,
Stopping only to
pull my top back down.

    Submerged, my jumping
    needs no aid but buoyancy.
    Solvent to strange
    enthusiastic repetition.

Nothing’s freer than
knowing where I’ll land.
When You Ask “So, does he understand anything?,”

I wish

I could take you home
to meet my brother.

I wish

you were a nurse,
so you’d have a slight grasp on his situation.

Or, a pastor—
one who speaks to him sans
apprehensive pauses in infantile pitch,
sees God’s work.

I wish

I could define *total care*
without bleak connotations.

I wish

I could sketch his smirk
when friends reveal
his Christmas gifts in November,
forgetting he listens.

He’s just a guy.

Non-verbal.

I don’t wish
that would change.

I just wish
you’d stop assuming
silence equals
not understanding.
When College Walls Talk

they threaten shrink or bruise; remind of 1960s anti-protest origins narrow halls too many turns no space to congregate.

Hostile Architecture. Even newer construction suffers from Afterthought Architecture all because someone didn’t sit down (and remain seated) while planning. Thus, buildings taunt You do not belong micro-aggressive in anaphora while mocking my rolling anger. Hush. It’s a gift to even be here.
Irony

After Hemingway’s “Baby Shoes”

His last Christmas, Bro got me a box of 30 disposable cold brew coffee filters.
I got him 5 reusable feeding tube pads.
Our Ideas of Heaven Come from Movies

People say the Bible says
the dead shall be healed in heaven.
But—people also say all dogs go to
Heaven and God helps those who help
themselves.

Those brought into this world broken
Will finally walk, nay run, to their loved
ones passed before.

I won’t say Show me the verses.
That’s a recipe for factious
formation of new denominations.
Truth is, few know the theology
attached to their identity.
We prefer Pop Culture Heaven.

Fuck that!
Miracle-Perfect Health should replace
terrestrial insurance.

It should not be the MAJOR selling point
of Afterlife Bliss; No.
First off, the shock of flipping a rusted-stuck toggle
from sickness to health
alone would take eternities to process
if mortal minds stayed fragile.
(And, if personalities are to remain kin-recognizable,
they must).

If you get to say: time slows down, speeds up, stops
or order a combo for all three (with any number of substitutions);
I’ll remind you it’s still death dysmorphia and dream up a more
appealing flying, flaming wheelchair
with eyes within eyes and wheels upon wheels—
durable medical goods goes Revelation.

I don’t want to consider the nonverbal speaking
or the mobility impaired lamely walking
when flight is on the table,
cloud, whatever.

Seriously! A Healed Body is not useful
in Wing Town, it’s another disability.
Grounded. Yep, spend a lifetime confined—
at the bleakest—and get another form of confinement
(or aids) as a faithfulness reward. Sounds like fun.
Especially after you spend lifetimes telling
disabled folks God granted them impairments
to generate empath object lessons for every
hapless able human in sight like some sort
of MMO quest-giver NPC. There’s more
to me than exclaiming *Consider and accept*
difference! and,

well, if you believe in John’s Gospel
disabled educator and dead-healing,
there’s a contradiction. If disability’s divine—
why do you privilege removing God’s marks of favor
when one bows worshipfully into his presence?
Shouldn’t misfit toys then be exultated?

I don’t want to hear about how you
think disabled children are angelic
(even on Earth) or how Satan’s
a misunderstood ruby of a man cast
down into a nine-circled home.

That’s Dante and Milton’s epics melded,
not Genesis’ turgid canon.
Any answer you give my concerns is just
as much fanfiction.
Remember, Biblical Jesus proved his
Godhood by repeatedly eradicating
physical hardships.

Consequentially, modern faithful
lay hands with theatrics and release
endorphins that quickly fade to fail-safe distant

*Just Waits.*

How do people not hear themselves wishing us
Dead?

Why would I want that threatening comfort?
I need to believe there’s mere angelic analgesics
Nothing More.