Rethinking Repair

Monica Rentfrow

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RETHINKING REPAIR

by

Monica K. Rentfrow

A THESIS

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For the Degree of Master of Arts

Major: English

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RETHINKING REPAIR

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University of Nebraska, 2010

Adviser: Hilda Raz

*Rethinking Repair* is a semi-autobiographical collection of serious and humorous poetic works that explores effects a body with dwarfism has had on one individual. Through personal experience, *Rethinking Repair* is a collection of poems that explores the effects a body with dwarfism has had on one person. Most of the poems lean on a precise moment when dwarfism—a rare medical condition present at birth—directly has influenced the emotion or outcome of a situation. Conversely, I illuminate moments when dwarfism has had absolutely no direct influence on my experiences; I do this to counterbalance the possible perception or belief that all the experiences in my life center on dwarfism. Indeed many poems are simple displays of managing the “repair” of familial and everyday stresses. In this way, the collection serves as an example of an unusual life experience. Because it focuses on the realities and exigencies of living with dwarfism, this narrative on repair is a crucial addition to the discourse of diversity studies. More specifically, this collection will further the discourse of dwarfism in literature. The poems collected in *Rethinking Repair* are organized in three sections—each of which contains poems that center on the concept of repair to the body, the family, and the mitigation of everyday stresses. Poetic influences include such poets as Mary Oliver, Ted Kooser, Paul Guest, and James Cihlar; professorial influence includes Ted Kooser, Hilda Raz, and Grace Bauer.
Introduction

Through personal experience, *Rethinking Repair* is a collection of poems that explores the effects a body with dwarfism has had on one person. Most of the poems lean on a precise moment when dwarfism—a rare medical condition present at birth—directly has influenced the emotion or outcome of a situation. Conversely, I illuminate moments when dwarfism has had absolutely no direct influence on my experiences; I do this to counterbalance the possible perception or belief that all the experiences in my life center on dwarfism. Indeed many poems are simple displays of managing the “repair” of familial and everyday stresses. In this way, the collection serves as an example of an unusual life experience. The way dwarfism has shaped and influenced my life experiences also provides a context for the way this collection of poems contributes to the larger discussion in diversity studies.

Though the content of *Rethinking Repair* has existed in my writing for a number of years, the true production, collection, and refining began in my Masters of Arts program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. During those two years I devoted four workshops to the crafting of this project—under the caring, practiced editorial eyes of Hilda Raz, Grace Bauer, Naomi Shihab-Nye, and Ted Kooser. After much shuffling, deleting, and rethinking of poems, my vision for a collection focused on my experiences as a little person is finally complete, or just begun.

When I first read James Cihlar’s *Undoing* (Little Pear Press) my own vision for this project immediately was clarified. I vividly remember reading through the poems, stunned by how confident and comfortable Cihlar is with his struggles—namely, a difficult childhood home life and the struggles that encompass a homosexual relationship.
Until reading Cihlar’s work, I had assumed or been led to believe that poets did not write whole collections on emotionally difficult materials. The opening lines to the title poem, which is the last poem in the book, read “Unfamiliar with the logic of the physical world,/ As a kid I did not understand repair.” My response to those two lines was the opposite: as a kid, I comprehensively understood repair. This response led to my title poem, “Rethinking Repair,” in which I saw the purpose of my book. Reading Undoing was like a green light I had been missing. For this I am indebted to him.

Upon entering my second workshop, I began to notice the tone of negativity cast over my work. Fearful of the evolving negative, desolate, and hopeless reflection on dwarfism my work might be portraying, I turned to Paul Guest’s Notes for My Body Double (University of Nebraska Press). Here I found a poet who not only embraced his hardships, but turned them into wit and jest. In these pages I found a blend of difficult reality (“there is never/ an answer large enough for a world/ so huge with meanness”) and the easy unreality (“faith I follow/ is the sky because it never falls,/ despite the testimony of chickens/ snuffed by hail”). Guest showed me how I could link reality and unreality, of horror and humor in my own writing. I began to unearth the light-hearted and positive attributes of both my personality and my experiences in my work—found in poems such as “Anesthetic Awakening” and “Little Victories.” My collection began to balance itself.

Prior to my Masters work, I was closed-minded to the practice of form in poetry; I felt it would constrict my natural rhythm and creative thought processes. I enrolled in a workshop entirely structured on prosody. Through various writing prompts, I experimented with dozens of established forms. The most successful piece that emerged was my sonnet, “Little Victories,” the form of which is a perfect fit for this memory of a
vivid, important moment that I always tell as a joke. While most of my writing from that workshop in form felt forced, I learned the value of experimentation with an open mind. I gained a better understanding of the kind of writer I am. Since the workshop I have retained this understanding, looking at the form of poems that seem to be struggling, sometimes realizing an alternate form would strengthen the poem. One example was my revision of “Semi” from a prose poem to a poem comprised of tercets.

Before my work at UNL, I understood my near-obsessions with unique, surprising images and sounds, and my tendency to compress the content into an extremely small poem. Early in my Masters career Hilda Raz helped me to break my compacting habits, encouraging me to “stretch out the poem, more!” Near the end of my Masters work Ted Kooser helped me to develop my eye again, asking “what is this poem really trying to say?” Between these two opposing practices, I have developed a more balanced editor’s eye, having practiced revision of poems to know which need expanding and which want compressing. Working with both Grace Bauer and Naomi Shihab-Nye helped to refine my practice with image and sound revision. I can more easily spot when I’m overworking an image, reoccurring color or word, or relying too heavily on alliteration and other sound techniques. Reading and reviewing works by established poets I admire, such as Mary Oliver, has helped my practice all the more. I have learned the importance of trimming details to adhere to truth, yet bend to art.

It is difficult to express all I have learned from compiling this collection; it is equally difficult to capture the feeling of accomplishment that follows toiling so long over one’s creative work, especially when it is such an immediate extension of life circumstances that are so easily misunderstood. Of course, the finished product is always
worth the early frustrations and lasting worries. In the early stages of this collection, I sprawled seven dozen pages of poetry across my futon. Next, I reviewed every poem and began stacking pages into theme-related piles—shuffling poems from one pile to another as I found overlapping themes. I knew this collection needed poems that focused on the theme of bodily repair, but as I shuffled, I found repair in other contexts. For example, the poem “Nuts for My Sister” was a poem of interpersonal repair in my relationship with my sister. The poem “Metal” was a departure from the main theme in the way it deconstructs conventional understanding of the use of metal and reconstructs it as it relates to the practice of medicine. And the poem “Spondyloepiphyseal Dysplasia Congenita” expressed the theme of psychic repair through images of the stressed and distressed body coming to terms with itself—namely, that I have been comfortable in my small body in this average-sized world since I was young. It was difficult for me to cut so many dozens of poems, though I reassured myself the rejected poems would find a home in a later collection. With that in mind, I have begun a second volume of work tentatively titled *The Color of Warmth*, in which some of the themes of repair are reverberating and renewing themselves.

The poems collected in *Rethinking Repair* are organized in three sections—each of which contains poems that center on the concept of repair to the body, the family, and the mitigation of everyday stresses. I refrained from placing poems with too-similar contexts adjacent to each other (such as poems about my relationship with sister or father) as I determined that most readers would not respond to such overt, obvious hinges. I think readers want a bit of discovery for themselves, yet not so much to be laborious. Reviewing poetry books in my personal library reaffirmed my editorial instincts. After
much dedication and attention, I have discovered the order that brings the strengths of each individual poem to link with another, to make a narrative focused on dwarfism.

At this point I want to make a larger connection to the context of my work. As a community, Little People (as many of us prefer to be known) share many of the distinctions of marginalized groups, such as profound loyalty, shared experience, and a safe haven of knowing we are with those who know our lives nearly as well as we know our own. Little People of America, Inc. (LPA)—a national non-profit organization supporting and advocating for individuals with dwarfism—has made great strides in its attempts to bring acceptance of dwarfism in a movement that is still finding its feet. Since its establishment in 1957, LPA has brought the little people community to a level of connectedness and strength the founders would find amazing. LPA is no longer just a social networking organization. Through the years the strong voices of active individuals arguing for change in societal discrimination and accessibility has taken the community and awareness of the general public to a positive high. While many of today’s influential voices choose the route of public sit-ins, protests, and other political measures, I am voicing my influence intentionally in the movement through creative literature.

Because it focuses on the realities and exigencies of living with dwarfism, this narrative on repair is a crucial addition to the discourse of diversity studies. More specifically, this collection will further the discourse of dwarfism in literature. Currently, what exists in literature continues to be autobiographical or historical accounts, fiction that has a dwarf character, or fiction written by a dwarf, that does not have any contextual relationship to dwarfism. Though it is no longer acceptable or interesting to promote narratives relating, say, to blindness in this way, narratives on dwarfism are often
demeaning, disrespectful, bigoted, or solely serve the purpose of provided crude or unkind humor. Though the existing resources to help inform about and support dwarfism are useful and necessary, the literature is slim. The pool of creative literature is even thinner, and I have yet to find poetry that takes up this topic. *Rethinking Repair* possibly is the first collection to confidently, but not overtly, bridge the gap between dwarfism advocacy and poetic discourse. In this respect I believe it will be of real service not only to literature and poetry, but to human understanding.
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section one
Another S.E.D.c. Scratch

"The opposite of beauty is not ugliness, it is injury"
-- Greg Hewitt, The Eros Conspiracy

Metal can save a life
so can blood and bone.

I didn’t know during recess that
my uncle leaves work
to have a needle stuck in his arm
so does mom,
my grandparents

A week later part of them
becomes part of me
in a bright, cold room
as my neck learns how to be strong
with the help of dead man bone,
mashed shavings from my shins,
wire-bent bits,
and a dash of grace
Anesthetic Awakening

it’s a strange thing to lose three days,
   wake with a cry, like rebirth

suddenly what you knew is new
   blinking in this: a re-formed you

a desire to overturn tables
   bubbles through blood

to rise from this bed of clotting cement,
   pluck plastic tubes, lasso freedom

crash and thrash through walls,
   this Bigfoot being of you
Little Victories

After five months flat in bed
as bones healed at the base of my head
the doctor removed the stabilizing pins
that pierced the first layer of skull skin.
It would be unwise to sit, they said,
without a therapist. But when mom sped
to fetch my snack, a desire set in
to rise by myself— and, boy, I would win.
Hand gripping rail, I threw a leg (dead
muscled) over the edge, the second as first led,
and sat there committing a hospital sin
while the world refused to stop the spin.
Mom came back and nearly dropped her cup;
when asked what I was doing, I said: “Sitting up!”
My Halo

I grew stronger in my neck
where the doctor stuffed in
bone and tiny wire
drilled four pins
into my head one-eighth inch
while I was asleep
puncturing little holes
in my forehead and under my hair

The four bars threaded down my front and back
to join with a cast around the torso
except for the cut out crater
where I could reach through
thin, stretchy fabric to scratch around my navel.

For five months I lay on my bed in the living room
to watch Power Rangers on my side
sleep on my front, the bed four inches from my eyes
do homework on my back with triangle-prism glasses
poop into a bedpan with a towel across my waist
lying in my halo around our house,
too awkward to slide me into a car
Daily Practice

busy checking cheques of a fat-forties man
who’s just left, she doesn’t see me, next in line

I’d like to pound with bear fists on the counter wall
or chuck a pen at her forehead

but I hang back a few feet, put on the practiced grin,
pretend I’m wanting not to disrupt this grand work
Semi

I did it because I could,
because I was scared to do it,
and because it was there—
resting between yellow-painted lines,
its gigantic round feet, long-stretched body,
eyelids holding back the glare,
and silence that chilled my toes.
I double-checked the head, to be sure it was asleep,
then made for it, dashing under the hollow,
metal belly. There was space enough but I ducked anyway.
I did not look up until I breathed on the other side
and lived to tell the tale.
Metal

I.

paper clip
bracelet
notebook binding
handcuffs
screws
plates/shunts
electrical wiring center
piping
silverware
scaffolds
sheet metal
factory machinery
blood content
water impurifier
elevator handrail

II.

the way it bends to the mind
natural resource made unnatural
shape-slammed to make tools that shape-slam
shrieking sound of laser cutting
requires goggles, lead-weight gloves
reflects light to capture pictures
holds time in its place
prints paper, templates, person x-rays
cuts what shouldn’t be cut
brainless follower of controls by another
fulfills purpose of solidity and strength

III.

piping shrieks to the sound of laser cutting what shouldn’t be cut  宙 handcuffed, holding
time in its place 宙 a brainless follower of controls from another 宙 silver ware prints
paper, templates 宙 personal x-rays require goggles 宙 lead-weight gloves shape-
slammed to make tools that shape sheet metal the way it bends to the mind 宙 reflecting
light to capture pictures of blood controls 宙 natural resource made unnatural
Stakes

I was lying on the hard white table top, the pins like not yet rusted stakes of a country fence jamming out of my knee and ankle. For reason I do not remember I could not be given anesthetic. My insides shook like a burp in the Grand Canyon.

A man came in with bolt cutters as big as a German Sheppard hidden behind his back. He approached the left side of the table while I tried to focus on the ceiling tile with the painted happy butterfly.

I could see the one leg of the cutters at attention in the air. I closed my eyes.
I don’t really like babies 
but the young SEDs get me 
every time 
the way they stagger 
with limbs they may never grow into 
on hips that contain not an ounce 
of bone 
chattering in high octaves 
and pushing themselves back up 
from the floor 
chasing others twice their size 
short-cutting under tables with no need 
to duck head 

Once, sitting on the side 
of a crowd, I saw a girl of three, 
very small, 
padding about, darting from one 
side to the other, weaving through legs 
like corn stalks 
while parents sat by 
seemingly cooler than the cucumber 
on my lunch plate 
and I just about pulled a superhero stunt 
before I realized I did just the same 
at her age
The Bone Room

My doctor’s secretary walks
to the door of The Bone
Room, turns a key in
an old metal lock. Only
a teenager, I do not know
what Laura is offering me.

I am admitted to a room
full of bone bits and wholes
on thin wooden shelves,
in cabinets behind dusty
glass doors. Missing bodies’ hands,
joints, club feet, a pelvis, a cranium
enlarged from achondroplasia.
It is like a history
of my ancestors, my people.
I look but do not touch.

I turn around
and there it is: a whole
skeleton, complete with scoliosis.
Missing eyes, missing spirit—
it hangs in its case.
My feet grow roots
and my ears fold in
on themselves as Laura
recites facts, smiling.
It was such a structure
that if my skin and muscle were to fall
away it would be me
standing forever in a glass display.
I could be a sacrifice to science.
section two
Population Control

you always want two caterpillars
she says on the day I learn to pluck weeds

I’m warned to never let them kiss
because they might get too attached
as I take from her palm
the tiny pruning tool,
turn to the mirror

I hear that’s why we take out
some of their legs every week

I lean into the wall
the way I’ve seen her tilt,
press belly-gut to granite—
when I wince she smiles:
a leg falls in the sink

I look for the hole, shocked
that I can’t find the wound

even when she flips on the vanity
to draw those bugs out—don’t
forget that light scares them still
as my hand raises for round two
in this fight of face gardening

later, looking at the finished job, I wonder
when the lady bug popping lessons will begin
What to Keep in a Kangaroo Pouch

toothbrush
water bottle
extra shower soap
a change of clothes

neck pillows
campfire logs

a guitar
some stars

quilt from our bed
brown sack breakfast

the keys you forgot
on the way out the door
Nuts For My Sister

I took you a crunchy peanut butter sandwich today while you worked—nuts of love bulging the slices of bread

I wrapped it in a napkin, then another and another, securing the wrapped sides with tape, as I wish I could you

I brought you also a few small bars of chocolate, as if its sugar could make your world sweeter
Tender

I would swear
it was my father’s favorite
word. I’d hear
it almost every dinnertime,
how tender the meat was.
Pork, beef, turkey,
and the venison he’d shot
the week before: it was
all tender, any way he cooked it.

I do not hate meat,
but I do not like most
besides ham and seafood.
My father hardly ever ate seafood.

What he didn’t know was
that if he weren’t in the kitchen
counting how many of the “agreed”
bites I’d eat, my baby sister
was reaching across plates
bite after tender bite.
Contemplating College Majors

I noticed my father
when we drank coffee
in brown chairs
on his cement patio,
the sun beat against
the cold breeze
on our skin, pleased
as much as I
at the sight, a moment
of soft words and smiles
when I learned
that even mean men
can be sweet in stillness
I Aim…

Afraid of backfire throwing me on my butt, I instinctively lock elbows, close my eyes, pretend I can shut my ears. My great-grandfather’s pistol is cold and foreign to me, though not my father. I think of his first shot, about my age, Grandpa watching nearby to see if his directions were followed. Perhaps my father closed only one eye. My eyes snap open at the shot to see dirt spring up where my bullet landed. I am surprised to find the world unchanged. I smile. My father is smiling. Maybe Grandpa smiles above the clouds. I look across the dirt ditch—one of many on my father’s land behind his ranch-style house. I look at the milk jugs, glad they are not birds or other prey my father hunts with his rifles. I raise the gun. I aim this time. I miss. I aim again. No dust cloud this time.
The Bookshoppe & Superior Perk

for Lisa

The door chimes as I push
into my place, walking down
the slant of spotted cement
—the floor of a once hardware shop

I hear the familiar hello
as I pass red couches, books
on thin metal shelves, wicker
tables where sandwiches slowly disappear

Lisa talks about her two boys,
one in Australia. She suggests a good
book she’s read, looks up a title
I seek. We smile over an old joke.

If Anne were working she’d talk
about biking to work. Barb, her granddaughter.
All three ask how classes and other
friends are getting along this week.

Streetlight lies on the counter
from the big front windows
where I pick up a fat, baby
blue mug of chai only Lisa can make

I sit, cross ankles, sip,
watch water fall from the green
awning to the sidewalk, feel
warm sliding down a throat to a tired body
Putting a Spin on Things

for Lin

Was it your idea
or mine to take
the world into our hands
close our eyes
feel the rise and fall
of mountains, oceans,
countless countries
spinning out of control
under our fingertips,
the whole Earth painted
in crayon colors

suddenly the world stopped
and I would lift my pointer
to read the black print
of foreign lands: Sri Lanka,
Czechoslovakia, San Francisco

sometimes we’d spin
again, peeking through closed
lids, until we landed on one
our tongue didn’t trip on,
while we knew any place would
be better than being here
and neither of us said it
Google Midgets

Bridget the Midget

Eric the Midget

Midget fight on Springer

Hire a midget

Rent a midget.com

Japanese Midget Submarine

A tiny sub-species of the human race.

Mainly raised in midget mills, for the entertainment of normal people.

Midget madness

Easy midget

Midget handjob

North Eastern Midget Association

Midget Motors Supply

The Midget Manifesto. Proposal:

Harness the inherent power of midgets to provide clean, reliable energy,

and a source of entertainment for mankind.

Quarter Midget racing for kids

Midget Throwing: A Lost Art

Wonder Midget

Modest Midget

For over a decade, I dreamt of fucking a midget

An extremely small person who is otherwise normally proportioned: offensive.
A Minute Ago

a guy winked
at me downtown
it was not the sort of wink
that awakens butterflies
in my stomach
but, rather, the kind
that feels like a spider
crawled out of your crotch
Story of My Life

I am paper
reams and reams of it
paragraphs stuck
in my armpits and flab
I wish weren’t back there,
lodged in hair
roots, bulging
at the seam where my
rib was spared, stitched
in the button holes
of my legs, clamped in,
bound, deep
in my spine
The Pine

undisturbed by a loud landworld
dozens of ducks sleep
in the evening sun
on quiet waves
with curled necks tucked
in warm silhouette feathers
Forgotten

it’s raining like the sound
of two keyboards being typed upon
but you’ve lost the ability to listen
after all this time spent sliding
windows shut and cursing
forgotten umbrellas

forgotten are the days of puddle
seeking and climbing dark tree bark
to sip from leaf bowls while yellow
peeks between the clouds

no, now there are meetings to run,
clocks to race, and ladders to climb instead
alternating hand and foot to move
up instead of forward
Hypotheticals

if I could choose
the body & being
of my next life
I’d be
a lightening bug:
though my wings
might be bent a bit
or legs squashed
from a small hand
cupping me out
of the night air,
and maybe even forget
to breathe
inside an old jar, it’d be
worth it to see close up
the light in the smile of this child
No hammer was holstered
or pipe laid or wire connected
but we had maps of neighborhoods
to canvas, all with a door to knock on
and flash our badges proving
we were not looters or other unwanted

we sat on couches, pointed at shingles,
walked through rooms to survey Katrina’s
damage, writing down which mechanics
needed to stop at this house

mostly though, we drank lots
of tea, gave hugs,
listened to stories that wrung
our hearts, and heard thanks
for sacrificed spring breaks

no hammer was holstered
or pipe laid or wire connected
except those within ourselves
at the end of the day or mornings
on the way to the next neighborhood
when we prayed for more
of ourselves to give
After pulling the hoodie over her head, leaving it up for warmth, she unzips the tent’s flap. Morning coolness rushes, awakening tiny arm hairs in their sleeves.

She stuffs hands in pockets and pads across the dirt path to the community fire ring at the center of the campsites. Here parents wait for the hour when children wake. Fathers read newspapers. Mothers chat with mothers. Nearly all have coffee cups in hands, laps, or camp-chair drink holders. The fire from last night’s roast and singing fest is quiet now.

She drops into a chair near her mother with a sleepy grin of greeting. Someone asks how she slept. With her age and love for this weekend, she is one of the first kids up.

A bird calls to a bird, a newspaper folds and unfolds, wood pops while laughing souls do not hear the fluttering wings of forgotten deadlines in the distance.
Gelston Hall 150

many full moons have filled the sky
since I have looked at this window

I see the ledge where my bonsai tree stood proud
in its square blue pot, pebbles encasing the trunk

I remember the futon friends would stop in
to have a nap on while I read at my desk

with the wooden loft Dad built standing over me,
peppered by multi-color marker messages—a sort of yearbook—

and the lounging stuffed animal, King Frog, atop my tiny TV
we gathered around with pillows and popcorn on the tile flooring

and the standing closet where I hung my towel
after the morning war with community showers

and the courtyard I would gaze upon on hard days—
the spring grass, the fallen fall leaves, the snow-covered oak
section three
Routine

I was reminded of my mother’s love
as I lay in an extended wheelchair
in the kitchen, leaning
from one hip to the other
as she slid out my underwear
with its gathered plush of red
and slid a fresh set under
before the dam broke again

After velcroing the shorts around
my pinned and pin-filled legs
and locking the seat up in its place
she pulled back the curtain
separating our teamwork
from family watching
America’s Funniest Videos
on the old, flower-print sofa.
6-seater Cesna

I left my corporate desk
to fly across
a corner of the country

I touch my Cesna down,
rubber fighting asphalt,
scream by the tower in this small town
to pick up a girl
young
probably pressing fingers to vending glass

she is small
    not fragile
yet broken in places

a man who knows
which hinges need screws
waits for her
in a wing with warm-painted walls
washing his hands again and again
with skin-peeling soap
Reflecting on My Place in the Cosmos

“In paradise, hospital beds sit under ageless mahogany and sycamore that bear every kind of fruit” -- Fady Joudah, *Pulse 13*

There are no hospitals in heaven!

Paradise is better than any bark bed one can dream up!

NO MORE roommates (who throw linens at nurses)
always managing to check-out before you do,
leaving you alone with crushed and crusted
… “food” they seem to call it

NO MORE drip-dropping meds or pills in plastic cups
or being handed something they believe to be toilet paper
in a “private” space that smells of bleach and sick
and they return every two hours to feel you up
for BP and pulse checks
and each time you think, almost aloud

Yes, I’m still lying in this damn bed
staring across to the cream-colored wall
at the TV with the same lame shows
and I’m wondering if the world outside
has CHANGED
since I realized
Earth is the question place,
Heaven the answer
Putty Syringed into Outer Ear Will Harden

She stares through the window,
waiting for the boop and blips
that will tell me how to adjust
her new hearing aids, what pitches
of frequency and volume will help,
not hurt, her tiny eardrums

In the sound booth, freckled by holes
like corkboard that keeps sound out,
or in, she can’t hear me
until the pilot muffs are removed

I slide in the machines
with molding fit for the outer ear
made two weeks ago and teach her
how to turn them on, or up, before test
two when suddenly she is big-eyed
hearing the world

She wants to know what that sound is,
one she’s never heard
in her nine years of living,
but she can’t name it, can’t grab it
like the paper-bag rustling it is, so close
to her—right there! that, what is that!—
sitting, twisting, stillness,
trying to hold the sound
like blue jello in her hands
when she pins it—
oh! it’s my shirt
on the back of the chair!
Short Rules

short hand
short stories
short of the mark

short list
short supply
short a bit on cash

short coming
short circuit
short-distance calling

short stop
short run
short of breath

short cut
short bus
shortest path A to B

short skirt
short shorts
short-term relationship

short while
short lived
short of a miracle
The Gait Lab

for once I am a munchkin in this Kansas land gone wrong: I’m lit up, while the lights are off, with all these electrode balls stuck on my fibulas, femurs, spine, shoulders, and I’m walking the yellow brick road with this same old limp as these laser lights connect with the balls to track at what angle exactly the ankle turns out, the hip pops up, and the back strains to compensate, all so that the great Wizard can tinker with his tools behind the curtain and I’ll emerge from the mansion with a better set of legs
Ty 3

Pains from my vertebrae glue
every fragment of my body
Tylenol 3—thank God for codeine—
dulls the work of the carpenters
and convinces my eyelids anchors are attached.
Ty 3, fed through one of my many plastic
octopus legs,
pumps rivers to the source
where they zipper-opened my spine
and clamped the metal poles side by side.

I want to let mom borrow
Ty so he can shield her
from the “whore,” “whore”
my father hurls at her
from across my hospital bed.
The Red Box

Sometimes during lunch or watching cartoons on the TV that hangs from the ceiling, a blood-poke lady comes to take my blood. She’ll come in carrying her red box that is like a jail for all the blood she takes from kids. She’ll have on one of those nurses shirts with the happy animals all over it—hippos or cats or teddy bears in all different colors. I think it is funny she wears those kinds of shirts because she isn’t as happy as the animals are. She knows I don’t like her, even though I don’t mean not to like her. I make my hands into big rocks that don’t open when she comes in—my fingers hiding the purple they have turned from so many pokes. Sometimes I get poked four times a day, sometimes only two times. I like those days.

I don’t think the blood-poke lady likes doing the pokes. I think she has a mean boss who works in the basement of the hospital and he tells her to take the blood from kids. I am glad he doesn’t do the pokes.

She comes to the side of my hospital bed. With her spidery fingers she starts to open my hands, trying to pull my fingers out. But I am strong. Mom has to help her and tells me to open my hands. She knows I don’t want to.
I, Your Shield

I hugged you until you fell asleep
and they slid a tube in your throat

a nurse carried me out
through double doors

back in mom’s arms
I thought of you lying there
shieldless
while they broke your body,
a sacrifice to science

mom hugged me until
we saw you again,
waking to the fight
of the long night ahead,
of tubes, beeping, blood
pokes and pressure cuffs,
of me tucked in
that space between
your hip, arm, and
a heavy cream blanket
My Halo Has Shifted

I flew over continental states
to a treatment room
hidden in a mean supply hallway
I was laid on the metal table
no medicine or pillow given me
my mom holding my hand
the nurse holding my head
Can’t move, Can’t cry
he said with his drill
before unscrewing the pins
and screwing them in again
earthquakes trembling
my broken body to its core
mom and my eyes latching together
to keep each other strong
as our souls made rivers on our faces
and pools on the floor
Those Little Reminders

“I wonder why it didn’t fade, as scars are supposed to”

- Molly Peacock, *The Second Blush*

scars are tattoos you don’t have to pay for

except you do

and the inker doesn’t ask for an idea:
just scribbles on the skin of the sleeper.

I’d like to have them removed, unstitched,
these battle wounds of war

take them from my shaved legs, the hills of my hips,
the zipper up the back holding the battery pack

but then I might fall apart

    wisdom ripped like wings at the seams
Rethinking Repair

“Unfamiliar with the logic of the physical world,
As a kid I did not understand repair.”
-- James Cihlar, “Undoing”

Most kids cannot
understand the logic of the world:
repairs are necessary
for the broken

I knew at eight
a body always can be dealt with,
as if a connoisseur
composed by pain

It becomes you,
a habit ingrained in inner brain,
teaching others how to think
in waves of new

You look at you,
see how the past pieces fit and click,
make a whole working puzzle
tight with glue