

Winner, Poetry Award, 2015

*Grace*

I forget that beauty strikes in the least likely places.

Thursday morning at the gait lab, his wheelchair whirs in,

He stands placidly as we roll up his pant legs, a wader with nowhere to swim.

The long mat studded with sensors lies before him, a thin rail to the left,

Video cameras the sole paparazzi for his runway, as we capture each step.

The passage painstaking, each knee pistons upward and bends back,

His upper body floats - a fishing heron poised to attack.

A raptor, a waddling robot, a tent in the wind,

The air seems thick, muscle tone too thin to leverage limbs.

His body forms a block of pulleys without ropes - like us, bone cannot stand alone.

The human body should not perambulate with this little strength.

At least, that's what the doctors have told him.

But the human body is not his body; averages and acceptance are mere concepts,

Abstract as the sense of how one's own body would feel pared

To the bare essentials like this.

He was a dancer. His body an art, more than a vehicle,

Never careening through life the way some swerve and skid,

And now, a Greek horse - betrayal in the muscles that were once his gift.

He should not walk, yet stacks vertebra on vertebra, inhales,

Pulls in the pulsations and dances across the sensor-filled stage.

And what beauty do I selfishly extract from this?

The beauty of walking - a miracle? Of the human spirit, indomitable?

Poise was never a matter of muscles, or posture,

It is the dance that bears life forward when bones give way.