

Crawling

- talking back to illness.

“ If you can't fly, run. If you can't run, walk. If you can't walk, crawl, but by all means keep moving.”⁷

Human beings have to invest their lives with meaning. We are each the hero of our own story, and the plot has to make sense. 'Sometimes things just happen' may be true, but we don't want to believe it, it doesn't satisfy. Faced with circumstances not to our liking, we demand 'Why? Why me?', and coming up with some kind of answer to that question is an emotional necessity.

Crawl derives from my own attempt to build a meaning for my chronic illness. I am creating purpose for a life that isn't what I expected and is a lot more uncomfortable than I would prefer. I have decided to believe that I am strong enough to make this a learning experience and grow wiser, therefore making better art and a more positive difference to the world than I would have done had I remained well.

As a logical argument, this has more holes than a string vest. There absolutely no reason to suppose that a sick person should be smarter or more productive than one who is well, all the evidence points the other way - on the whole sick people are, through no fault of their own, a drain on others and a pain to be around; and there's nothing remarkable about me that would seem to justify my claim to be an exception. I was pretty average to begin with and illness is only reducing how well I can think, and how much I can do.

I know I constructed this belief, and that it's unlikely that things will really work out that way. I know it's the result of an act of emotional salvage, the deliberate addition of an entirely spurious meaning to random events. Yet I can still make my chosen belief feel true, and feel so true that the word 'hope' is inappropriate to describe it. I believe that out of the grey drizzle of illness I am making, by persistence and determination, something that makes me beautiful and that has the power to change the way other people see the world so that their lives are also improved.

It is a fundamentally dishonest thing to do but it works rather well, and the more I think about it, the more I realise that this is what I have been doing all along. If there is room for doubt, if something is not absolutely proved or disproved, I may have thought that I was weighing probabilities in a rational manner but much of the time what I was really doing was trying out how the various beliefs might affect my life, and adopting whichever promised to be the most useful.