

Chaplain

by [Elizabeth Harlan-Ferlo](#) in the [August 2024](#) issue

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I heard you are in so much pain they had to pull you,  
hand over hand, from morphine's lagoon into full glare, so you can decide  
how they cut your body next. Your body is growing

wrong. For once, it's beyond your control, you who scoffed at God  
and religion, at anyone who couldn't keep up. I rarely saw you offer  
kindness, always disdain. But this is not consequence. For God's sake,

my theodicy's more sophisticated than supposing your suffering  
a divine comeuppance. Yet somehow when events  
bear true to the bigoted, reptilian mind, they have a way

of sticking on like a peeled-off label's glue. I'm a professional,  
at everyone's service to mourn, to dignify, sanctify  
your dying, your dead. My job: to hold the space for grief, but it leaks

out the top or seeps through the seal. My own draws  
through my skin to meet it. The ceiling and walls drip too,  
an Oobleck impossible to contain. Every day I'm drenched

like businessmen walk a London cloudburst, coatless and damp  
until it dries. Sometimes I remember to bring a change  
of prayers. Sometimes there aren't prayers enough to change into.