

Ars Medica

Volume 6, Number 2, Spring 2010

Founders

Allison Crawford, Rex Kay, Allan Peterkin, Robin Roger, Ronald Ruskin

Editorial Board

Adrian Grek *Issue editor*
Robin Roger *Managing editor*
Pier Bryden *Editor*
Rex Kay *Senior editor*
James Orbinski *Contributing international editor*
Allan Peterkin *Senior editor*
Ronald Ruskin *Senior editor*
Stephen Smart *Contributing art editor*
Terrence Sooley *Assistant managing editor*

Advisory Board

J. T. H. Conner, Jacalyn Duffin, Rebecca Garden, Jock Murray, Thomas Ogden,
Adam Phillips, Robert Pinsky, Mary V. Seeman, Anne Marie Todkill

Legal Advisors

Stanley Kugelmass, Adrian Zahl

Publishing

Ian MacKenzie *Copy editor and designer*
Liz Konigshaus *Executive administrator*

Web

Allison Crawford *Designer*



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada

We are grateful for the generous financial assistance of the Mount Sinai Hospital Foundation, the Munk Centre for International Studies, and the Canada Council for the Arts.

Ars Medica: A Journal of Medicine, the Arts, and Humanities

Department of Psychiatry, Mount Sinai Hospital
600 University Avenue, Toronto, M5G 1X5 Canada

ISSN 1910-2070

Published in partnership with University of Toronto Press, Journals Division

For subscription information or to submit a manuscript, contact arsmedica@mtsina.on.ca,
or visit www.ars-medica.ca.

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL..... *Expressing Embodiment*... 1

FEATURE PIECES

What Disturbs Our Blood..... *James FitzGerald* 11
Grief Therapy..... *Steven Hayward* 23
Painting John Brown Painting *Dagmar Dahle*..... 45
The Ghost Brush..... *Katherine Govier* 92

FICTION

Morning Report *Andrew Kirk* 64
The Decision..... *Urve Tamberg* 66
The Competition..... *Ann Ireland*..... 72
Sunday Night..... *Jay Baruch* 84
Moonlight..... *Naoko Awa* 101
The Nose *Patricia Rockman*..... 104
Josef: A Memoir *Anthony Jeffery* 108

POETRY

The Drama of the Daytime Sky *Anne Meisenzahl* 39
Migraine Sestina..... *Devon Miller-Duggan* 42
Hospital Gown 3..... *Lee Schwartz* 44
At the Gallery *Helene Berman Fallen* 51
Battleground, 1992 *Carolyn Van Der Meer*... 54
The Cancer Poems *Eileen Moeller* 58
Contrast..... *Sion Roy* 122

PERSONAL NARRATIVE

Unpacking My Daughter's Library ... *Joan Givner* 33
How to Be Allergic to Everything.... *David Schleifer* 60

NARRATIVE OF ILLNESS

Walking through the Interzone *Allan Jones*..... 2
HIV John..... *Ken Kirkwood* 115

DISCUSSION GUIDE..... 123

Editorial

Expressing Embodiment

The cover of this issue features an image by one of Canada's most celebrated artists, John Brown, taken from a series of paintings he did on the theme of disease. We're delighted to have this and other images from his works, accompanied by an interpretive essay by Dagmar Dahle.

She has expressed in words what Brown expresses in his art:

In the autopsy paintings you go inside the body, the magnified the body, the secret body, the body inside you . . . The fragile body, the penetrating and penetrated body, the vulnerable body, the miraculous body that heals itself and continues. The imperfect body . . . I remember the miraculous vulnerable body, the pain body, the joy body. I know and unknow my body.

Brown's arresting art inspires Dahle's eloquent verbal expression, both of which we strive to showcase in *Ars Medica*. The same process occurs in the poetry of Helene Berman Fallen, whose poem "At the Gallery" is a reaction to the work of artist Betty Goodwin, whose work was featured on the cover of our spring 2009 issue. "All losses subsumed by the whirlwind of making art," writes Fallen of her reaction to looking at Goodwin's piece, *The Vest*. Making art to grapple with the human condition of being embodied is the infinite theme that we continue to explore with each issue of *Ars Medica*.

Walking through the Interzone: Excerpts from a Vision-Loss Diary

Allan Jones

For six months in 1995 I kept a cassette tape diary that doubled as a phenomenological journal. This was the only time in my life when I recorded my daily experience in so concentrated a way, with particular attention to visual images and my sometimes baffled reactions to those images. From my earliest years I had been slowly losing my eyesight as a result of retinitis pigmentosa (RP). In 1990 I had left the foreign service to go onto long-term disability, as a result of chronic pain arising from degenerative disc disease. This was complicated by fibromyalgia and an odd set of neurological, muscular, and balance problems that would make white cane mobility an increasing challenge. Many years later these symptoms would finally be identified as the non-visual components of neuropathy/ataxia/retinitis pigmentosa.

By the spring of 1995 I had passed into a mode of sensory experience that was hard to describe, except to say that it was an in-between place that was not full sightedness or functional partial-sightedness or out-and-out blindness, neither one kind of definite world nor yet another. It was an interzone, a mindscape made up of fragmenting visual consciousness. The following selections describe what it was like to walk through it.

March 24

BUSHED. This is only the third day I have been out trying my old route since the snow and ice melted completely away, leaving me free to barge around without fear of slipping and falling. Everything must be relearned. The long enforced winter hibernation has blunted or even eliminated many little guide-memories, so now I have to build up a cache of new ones. One forgets the number of steps from here to there, the sequence of half-seen landmarks, angles of direction change, and internal timings that all have to be meshed in order for me to walk safely. The route takes me all the way to the river and back, a distance of about three miles, but I'm not up to that yet.

So when I got back inside the condo complex I spent some time on the safe and narrow internal sidewalk just behind our backyard, becoming more relaxedly aware of my body. Here were the legs and the oscillating cane arm and the other arm swinging freely by my side, all present and accounted for. I noted with surprise—had I really never noticed this before?—that in the absence of visual objects flowing into my advance, walking does not give the sense of forward movement. It feels more like treading water.

This pacing back and forth did not require me to think or to count steps or to see any visual cues, and that is why my attention was free to open up and take in the body just as it was. I find that the body as experienced in this direct way does not occupy visual space at all. Through its feet it connects with a series of sidewalk points that are entirely unconnected with one another; the legs attached to the feet do not perceptibly walk forward but simply thrash rhythmically, occupying or creating their own constant proprioceptive space. For those moments when the thinking mind is blank and memory inactive, as the cane point moves automatically between the two margins of the sidewalk, I feel I am going nowhere and indeed have nowhere to go. It is an oddly pleasant sensation, smooth and flowing and natural. One is completely inside the present moment.

April 29

PROBLEMS. On Monday I cadged a ride to Gloucester Centre where I got a haircut and had lunch with a friend. Then I walked alone out the

back exit of the centre, intending to take a bus home. What I saw before me confirmed how much eyesight I had lost since last fall. At that time there were still ephemeral visual cues that would show me where the street was, and the location of the long low building along which ran the sidewalk to the buses, and the cars and buses coming in my direction. Not that I actually saw any of those things—I would see faint fragments that I knew by experience were associated with road, building, sidewalk, bus. Now there was nothing but a featureless grey wash.

To get from the shopping centre to the sidewalk opposite, I have to traverse diagonally the access road and parking stalls. Doing this and listening acutely for approaching cars, I was intensely aware of my body, aware of it as a potential target. I got the angle right, skirted around a couple of parked cars, found the sidewalk, and in a laboured sort of way followed its curve around the building to its entrance. I went down the stairs and out onto the walkway and paused at the edge of the bus lanes. I had to cross four lanes of bus traffic with an island in the middle. No traffic light, just a pedestrian crosswalk that I could no longer see.

After listening carefully I stepped out quickly, feeling an odd kind of dissonance. With the visual memory of this crossing place still fresh in my mind, I was all too aware of the total absence of immediate visual percepts and the urgent presence of body sensations and mechanical noise. That was the dissonance: the non-fit between the visual void and the noisy acoustic plenum. It didn't add up, and for a few long moments I felt that I was in an unintelligible nowhere. How could I be simultaneously in a blank absence and a jangling, booming, grating presence?

When I reached the opposite side I found I could see neither people nor parked buses. Nor could I hear any idling motors. So I just waited, still and alert, until I heard a foot scrape a little off to my right. I walked toward this unseen person and asked about buses. No response. I waited, looking at the place in the air where he or she must be. Then a thick male voice: "No English." So I turned around to face the bus lanes and waited some more. Soon there were footsteps, an English speaker, and the required information.

I took the first bus that came along, one that would leave me about a mile from my house. I wanted to try the walk. This involved negotiating some broad and tricky sidewalks that did not square themselves at inter-

sections, but described a long quarter-circle curve with curbs cut so low as to be virtually indistinguishable from the street. After leaving the bus I negotiated all this without mishap, although in a plodding and tedious sort of way, until I got quite close to home. There at a certain point I had to cross Ogilvie Road against six lanes of traffic and pick up Eastvale at right angles to Ogilvie on the other side.

Off I went, and after what seemed to be an inordinately long stretch of asphalt I found a curb on the other side, but at an unexpected angle. I squared myself, found the sidewalk running in front of me, followed it a few yards to the right and turned hard left to pick up the adjoining sidewalk running down what I took to be Eastvale. As I walked on I thought that the traffic sounds were curiously loud for Eastvale, a two-lane residential street. I kept going but became increasingly unsure of myself.

And then before I knew what was happening—there was no discernible curb cut—I found myself somewhere in the middle of an open echoing space, with traffic roaring toward me seemingly from all directions at once. I raced quickly forward in a surge of what was almost panic, and practically fell over the grassy medium in the middle of the street. Obviously I was at the major intersection where I had got off the bus. How had I managed to double-back on myself in this way?

I retraced my steps as far as the Ogilvie-Eastvale intersection, and realized what had happened. I left the other side of Ogilvie too close to the corner and must have begun curving to the right. I missed the curve on this side probably by a couple of feet, veering unknowingly into Eastvale itself and winding up at right angles to where I thought I was. Everything else followed from that—right into no man's land. And all because even when I strike the right orientation, I can't seem to maintain it by walking a straight line.

May 2

TODAY I WENT FOR A WALK all the way down to the river for the first time this season. No problems. Very pleasant. Only a little dizzy and shaky. There was just one moment on the far side of the eastern parkway when I got rather turned around, at the point where I had to find the beginning of a gravel slope that leads down the hill to the bike path. I stood there, not sure of what was before me. Was I facing toward the slope or the river or the trees? I listened very carefully, and while I

waited for sound cues I slowly turned my head and looked around a full 180 degrees, seeing a dimensionless incoherent wash of blurry shades of grey with no edges anywhere. And I thought, how eerie this is, this visible something that is really nothing, this unrevealing light that seems to cling to my face. It could be either the great empty space of the river valley or a dense copse of trees just a few feet off.

Soon I got my auditory cues and turned to face what I now knew was the beginning of a downhill slope. It was only then that I began to feel the sense of great volume extending far beyond the face. Will I one day be able to feel this spaciousness direct and untranslated without the need for confirming sounds? Whether I do or not, the remarkable fact remains that the whole river valley, as I experience it, is spread out entirely and only within consciousness. That is the real marvel.

June 29

The walking was better today, the shoulders sore but usable. The weather was hot but gratifyingly brilliant. The bright afternoon sun cast plenty of shadows across my tree-lined route, so I was walking repeatedly from bright light to shade and back to the light. Before long I noticed that I was beginning to tense up whenever I got into a deep and extended patch of shade. In the areas of bright light I was allowing my cane to describe a lazy half-arc with each step, the cane arm moving only at the wrist. But when I got into the dark patches I was tapping out every step assiduously with a full swing of the arm.

Why was this happening? Within the light patches or the dark it was exactly the same sidewalk, exactly the same probability of running into obstacles such as kids, their little wagons, or cars parked halfway up a driveway. And because of a certain dazzle effect, the bright areas weren't giving me any more usable visual cues than the dark. But the dark areas felt more dangerous. Old memories and the deepest layers of the animal mind tell me that dangerous objects are hidden by darkness, not by light. That primitive stuff is still down there inside me, despite the recent knowledge that I can see practically nothing, even in the most optimal light. So walking as I did today from light to shade and shade to light, I was a child or animal that refuses to forget what it knows.

After leaving the last of the tree-lined streets I began my walking meditation, and there were moments of great serenity. As I neared home

I had the thought once again that this stage of RP, with its often chaotic visual fragments, can have a singularly compelling sensory allure, once I learn how to navigate through it. If I am compacted together as a tight body-thing trying to plow its way through that almost palpable light, with its swirl of bits and pieces, the light becomes a barrier and a menace. But to the extent that I can relax and unthing myself, becoming open and empty for the light, it shows itself as a lucent creamy presence in which the fragments seem naturally to belong.

July 30

WALKING AT NIGHT, a lovely rediscovery. Last night I went out for a solitary night-walk for the first time in many years. From my childhood I had been conditioned to regard night mobility as difficult. Even when I began using a cane, the RP night blindness made it hard to find my way after dusk. I certainly went out in the evening just as everyone else did, but like other RPerS I was always on my guard. The night world was the big dark box in which the self-luminous day world was contained, and from which it disconcertingly disappeared.

So over the past few years as my object-vision disintegrated and the physical problems of wielding a cane increased, the fixed mental association of nighttime with risk kept me more and more from going out alone after dark. I would avoid venturing into poorly lit or totally dark surroundings. I'd take a bus downtown to meet a friend in the city centre but wouldn't think of walking down to the dark riverside trails.

Now I see that this was all wrong-headed. While it was probably necessary to curtail my night-walking during the plodding transition from useful visual cues to the visual muddle I usually experience now, once the transition is made the door should stand open to the night. It struck me only yesterday—sometimes I am really, really slow—that walking at night might actually be easier in one sense. The almost total absence of light at night, at least as seen by these eyes, would eliminate the confusing optical illusions to which I am increasingly subject during the day.

Thus the trial run last night, with its gratifying results. The night air was wonderful, a major rediscovery in itself. And there was a sense of what I can only call spaciousness. Gone was the traffic noise of the day and other daytime sounds such as lawn mowers, leaf blowers, and boom boxes that seem to press around me. Now there was a quiet acoustic expansiveness in

every direction, as though the things around me were opening themselves to the sky instead of bunching inward toward me as their centre.

At the same time the actual walking did take more effort than I had expected, for my back and shoulders were still feeling the effects of the past couple of weeks. Legs also rather unsteady. I realized as I went along that during the day there are more little instances of subtle but useful reflected light than I had credited. They can occasionally indicate, for example, an upcoming curve in the sidewalk or perhaps a driveway. Because there were none of these now, my cane work had to be very constant and concentrated. The cane arm soon got sore, but I continued to take in the cool space all around me.

At a certain point I began to feel an odd nostalgia and had an unexpected thought: it's like being sighted again. What did I mean by this? Evidently it was just the memory of being young and out at night with someplace to go, and being able to derive much more from street lights than I can now. I had to stand still for awhile and let it all wash over me, the remembrance of walking with friends at night across the university campus on its clearly illuminated sidewalks, even occasionally seeing dim forms by the light of the moon. How did this wilful sensory body ever submit to growing this old, and becoming almost totally blind? This I felt not with a sense of loss but of wonder. And all the while the real Self knows itself to be neither young nor old, sighted nor blind.

On the way back home I was more attentive to the differences between then and now. Even where there was a street light and a very faint sense of ambient illumination, there was absolutely no depth perception. What I saw was a perfectly flat display of vague proto-shapes that seemed to be so uniformly close to me that they might as well have been painted onto my eyeballs. And a street light was a strange protean apparition; I could get no sense from sight alone how far away it was or even if it was really a street light. A light at a corner did not in itself confirm that I was at a corner. I had to use sound and touch to determine that I really had come to a cross-street. It was only then that the light I had been looking at finally appeared in perspective—a mentally created perspective—and assumed its correct size in relation to distance.

The same kind of thing happened when I was back among the condos and rounding the last corner to walk up to our front door. There it was,

a blurry light somewhere before me and off to the left. It appeared to be perhaps half a block away and at a considerable elevation, like a street light. That was impossible. I thought that I must be seeing the lamp mounted just beside my front door. And as I approached the front steps the blur did indeed morph into my ersatz carriage lamp, assuming not only a definite shape but a familiar, benign, domestic identity. Welcome home, Allan.

Allan Jones is a retired diplomat and a student of Vedantic philosophy. He is now immersed in writing a philosophical memoir called "Beyond Vision: Going Blind, Inner Seeing, and the Nature of the Self."

What Disturbs Our Blood: A Son's Quest to Redeem the Past

James FitzGerald

Those who know ghosts tell us that they long to be released from their ghost life and led to rest as ancestors. As ancestors, they live forth in the present generation, while as ghosts they are compelled to haunt the present generation with their shadow life.

—Hans Loewald, *On the Therapeutic Action of Psychoanalysis*

On a bleak November day in 1953, my mother Janet, a thwarted artist turned reluctant housewife, snapped the cold shutter of her camera and captured the image of my three-year-old self, wrapped in a hand-me-down corduroy coat with velvet collar. My charismatic, witty mother was a shape-shifter; I was an emotional weatherman, my head tilted like a radar dish, hyper-attuned to her mercurial moods. Some believe all writers write for their mothers.

Decades passed before I began to plumb the meaning of the fraught yet curious expression of the photographed boy, haunted by what he knows and is coming to know. Why did the nightmares of my childhood—slow suffocations, falling trees, flashing knives—routinely rumble through my unconscious like clues to an unsolved murder? What was

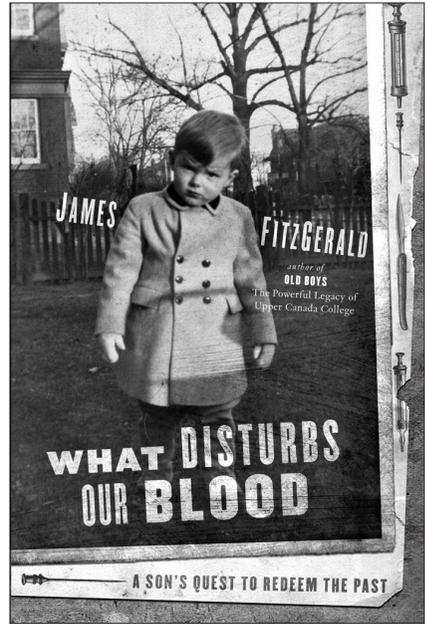
Adapted from James FitzGerald's memoir, *What Disturbs Our Blood: A Son's Quest to Redeem the Past*, published by Random House of Canada, 2010

I trying to figure out? What could I possibly make of the electrical storms that raged in my head? Even as a toddler, was I sensing in a pre-scient, wordless way that the gothic three-storey house on Balmoral Avenue where I slept was built by my long-dead grandfather, a driven, eminent doctor of whom no one spoke? Was I already interpreting the silences that covered the genteel surfaces of a family history I was made to feel I must never question?

My father Jack was also a fiercely dedicated doctor, and as I grew up, he acted as if his three children lived in another city. The only time he hugged me was after he suffered a breakdown in his fifties, at the peak of his professional success, but naturally I didn't know how to respond to the sudden gesture. He made two suicide attempts by morphine injection, and after stints in mental hospitals was fated to spend the last twenty years of his life alone in front of the television, neutralized by shock treatments and antidepressants. The questions whirled in my head: why was my father imploding before our eyes, trying to live up to the legend of some ethereal, long-dead, God-like figure none of us knew or remembered?

It was an act of sheer adolescent intuition that one day compelled me to ask my mother point-blank, "Why the silence enveloping my grandfather? Did he kill himself?"

Startled, she shifted her eyes and nodded wordlessly. Then she murmured something about a drug overdose, although she wasn't entirely sure. No further information was forthcoming, but at least I had a clue. As I studied the ticking time bomb that was my father, I wondered why everyone was colluding in dodging the obvious fact, the elephant in the bathtub: the unspoken impact of my grandfather on my father's life. And, of course, my own.



MY INABILITY TO FEEL LIKE ANYTHING other than a spectator in my own life finally pushed me at the age of thirty-three into the hands of a gifted psychodynamic psychotherapist. He knew that if I didn't pierce the mysteries of my silently disintegrating father and grandfather, I was doomed to re-enact a buried generational drama, one that was already undercutting my natural passions with an invisible hand. I learned that the only way out of the haunted house of my childhood was to return to it. To find myself, I must struggle to inhabit the alien skins of my father and grandfather, medical men pushed by troubled and withholding fathers and differently troubled and withholding mothers into extraordinary accomplishments in the world that in the end they could no longer sustain.

Year by year, recurring dreams, like cave paintings, guided me to the Pandora's box of repressed secrets, for of course there were more than one. One dream resonated deeply: a doctor in a white lab coat raised a scalpel and made a deep, vertical incision down the middle of my face, releasing a torrent of water. Was it a symbol of the accumulated generations of untapped grief of which I was the contemporary carrier? Or perhaps an uncanny, precognitive clue to the secret of my grandfather's end?

Following genealogical field trips to my ancestral village in Ireland, I started to systematically burrow through medical archives, museums, letters, and photo albums, drilling through the stone wall of my family's denial. I retraced my nomadic grandfather's footprints through Europe and North America, visiting the cities—Buffalo, Baltimore, Boston, Berkeley, New York, London, Paris, Brussels, Freiburg, Geneva—where he had trained and worked in the years before the First World War. I drew up a list of interviews with medical historians and aging former colleagues of my father and grandfather; I visited my grandfather's birthplace—and revisited my own.

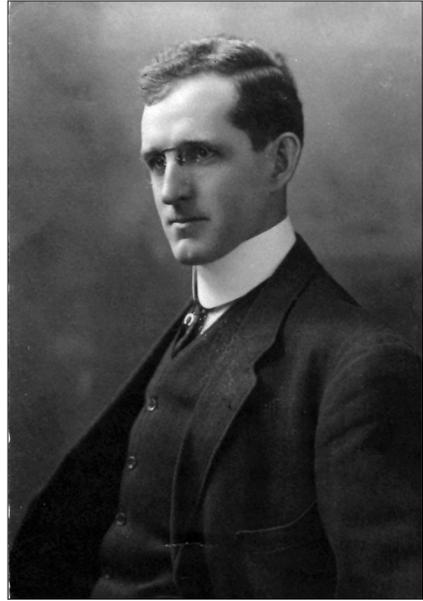
Gradually, I was able to digest the full grandeur, complexity, and impact of my grandfather's achievement. I was amazed to learn that Dr. John Gerald "Gerry" FitzGerald was a bona fide Canadian hero, a medical pathfinder of extraordinary drive and vision, his story inextricably bound up in an epic national drama. Between the two world wars, Gerry rose to the top of his profession as the founder of the Connaught

Laboratories and the director of its academic arm, the University of Toronto School of Hygiene—innovative institutions responsible for the saving of countless lives both nationally and globally.

I learned that the epochal discovery of insulin by Banting and Best in 1921–1922, and its subsequent mass production by Connaught, was only one feather in the lab’s cap; over a single generation, my grandfather had boldly conceived and helped build the modern institutional infrastructure of Canada’s public health system, making and distributing free vaccines, serums, and anti-toxins to all Canadians—a

radical challenge to entrenched, profit-driven medicine that shut out the poor. His biological products, together with sophisticated public educational programs, led to the effective control or eradication of a litany of killer diseases, including syphilis, diphtheria, rabies, tetanus, meningitis, typhoid, scarlet fever, tuberculosis, smallpox, influenza, polio, and diabetes. A dynamo who travelled the world for the Rockefeller Foundation and League of Nations, he brought Canada’s paragon of preventive medicine to the international community. The lines of his CV revealed a career trajectory of such intense, single-minded, self-sacrificing focus, it seemed he knew exactly what he was doing each step of the way. Everything about him shouted, “Go big or go home.”

Yet few Canadians seemed to know or remember him, and that struck me as typical of our cautious national character—outside praise failing to register at home. His obituaries glowed with admiration for a “great man,” yet strangely my father had never spoken of this ghostly figure who had not only shaped the consciousness of our family, but the entire country. Doubly strange that when I scanned the bookshelves of medical libraries, I found fat biographies of pioneering Canadian doctors



Courtesy James Fitzgerald

John Gerald “Gerry” FitzGerald, 1912

—Osler, Banting, Bethune, Penfield—yet no full account of my grandfather’s life. It felt as if his memory, like the ravages of diphtheria or polio, had been virtually erased. Why? What was my father—and medical historians—protecting us from? Why were they so determined to stand between the generations like a pane of stained glass? I was sensing something worse than suicide; something else, something even more unspeakable.

I WAS INTRIGUED TO LEARN that my grandfather had started his career as a neuropathologist—like the young Sigmund Freud—cutting open the brains of pauper Irish psychotics, searching for the germ of madness. I was further intrigued to find that when he left Toronto’s 999 Queen Street West Asylum in 1908 to work at the Danvers Hospital for the Insane outside Boston, my grandfather ceded his position of clinical director to the Freudian champion Ernest Jones; the two men became friends. Within months, in September 1909, Jones was joining Freud, Jung, and a small circle of devoted acolytes at a seminal psychoanalytical congress at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. It was Freud’s first and only visit to North America, and on this famous occasion he was reputed to have uttered the ironic remark, “Gentlemen, I bring you the plague.” So it was that my grandfather stood astride the seminal, conflicting factions raging in psychiatric circles across Europe and North America: the established biomedical model, viewing all mental and emotional disturbance as organic, biochemical, or genetic in origin; and the emerging, revolutionary challenge of psychoanalysis, dream work, and cathartic talk therapy.

As the battle lines were being drawn, Freud relied on Jones’s networking and administrative acumen to build a global movement. Initially, the North American psychiatric elite remained largely immune to the fledgling phenomenon of psychoanalysis with its unsavoury pan-sexualism and murky talk of the unconscious mind; Canadians resisted far longer than the Americans. Sustained, unstructured listening was not the kind of skill valued by doctors trained to treat illnesses they regard as organic; they failed to warm to the suggestion that symptoms were clues, full of meaning, rather than something to be medically labelled and eradicated. The neuropathologists, as a rule, dismissed the Freudians as no more sci-

entifically credible than an unruly tribe of witch doctors, for when they peeled back the layers of brain tissue, they saw no shred of evidence for the existence of the unconscious mind.

While in Toronto, Jones busily foisted the controversial works of Freud and Jung on medical students and the asylum staff of 999 Queen Street West. As he later wrote to Freud, “Two hundred innocent youths are being severely inoculated with psycho-analytical doctrines under the official auspices of the University of Toronto.”¹ Using the city as his base, Jones made “raids across the border” to address assorted medical and psychological societies in American cities; every summer, he sailed to Europe to read papers before an international congress. Occupying a three-storey house at 407 Brunswick Avenue in the wooded Annex neighbourhood at the northern tip of Toronto, Jones’s self-described “harem” included his wealthy, charming, but troubled Dutch Jewish mistress, Loe Kann, his sisters, Elizabeth and Sybil, and two female servants. Addicted to twice-daily injections of morphine because of a chronic kidney ailment, Loe was afflicted with cycles of manic-depression and was bedridden much of the time, where she nursed a burning hatred for her mother from whom she inherited her substantial wealth. Jones passed Loe off as his wife, but the wagging tongues of puritanical Edwardian Toronto knew the foreign doctor was brazenly living in sin.

Here Jones wrote *On the Nightmare* and *Hamlet and Oedipus*, his most original and influential works. “All the beliefs about the *Nightmare*, in whatever guise,” he concluded, “proceed from the idea of a sexual assault which is both wished for and dreaded.”² One outraged Toronto doctor, Herbert Bruce, railed that the Hamlet paper, probing the slippery crevices of the incest taboo, could have been composed only by a sexual pervert. When Jones reprinted a lubricious case history in the *Queen Street Bulletin* in April 1910—the journal formerly edited by my grandfather—it aroused a storm of controversy from which Jones never recovered. He explicitly detailed the sexual life of a thirty-nine-year-old manic-depressive Toronto woman and diagnosed a perversion in which she “identified the act of fellatorism with the partaking of the holy sacrament,” resulting in “a complete and exhausting sexual orgasm” as she

1 Ernest Jones, *On the Nightmare*.

2 Cyril Greenland, *Charles C. Clarke*.



Courtesy James Fitzgerald

University of Toronto Medical School, Class of 1903, Sackville and Gerrard Streets.



Courtesy James Fitzgerald

Gerry, right, at Pasteur Institute, Brussels, watching a colleague receive an injection of an experimental rabies vaccine, 1910.

sucked the rim of a cup of water. Even though C. K. Clarke, the superintendent of 999 Queen Street, publicly supported Jones, he was appalled: “Any ordinary reader would gather Freud advocates free love, removal of all restraints, and a relapse into savagery.”³ Quietly, Clarke removed his unrestrained colleague as co-editor of the *Bulletin*. Canada was proving a barren breeding ground for the seeds of the talking cure, which would not gain a foothold for another forty years.

In that same month of April 1910, now back in Canada, Gerry married my grandmother Edna. Still hoping to enlist my grandfather into the Freudian camp, Jones wrote his colleague, “I have thought out a rather original wedding present for you, namely a complete set of Freud’s works. As marriage is at times an adventurous enterprise, no one contemplating it will be harmed by an addition to his knowledge of the human soul.”

But after five years of draining work in five different public and private asylums in Canada and the United States, Gerry had grown frustrated that he could do little or nothing to help the irredeemably mad. Easier, perhaps, to wipe out diphtheria than schizophrenia; and so, placing his faith in the potential of the microscope, he plunged into four intense years of international training in bacteriology and the making of preventive medicines. While he never surrendered his commitment to the allied “mental hygiene” movement that would gain momentum over the coming decades, he was now widening his focus to attack the full range of infectious *physical* diseases, spurred by growing cries for the radical reform of the ever-worsening state of Canada’s public health. Psychiatry’s loss proved public health’s gain; upon his return to Canada, my grandfather conceived the Connaught Laboratories in 1914. There was no turning back.

GIVEN MY GRANDFATHER’S FATE, his brief flirtation with the Freudians naturally piqued my curiosity. On a winter day in 1995, I ventured into the psychiatric archive at CAMH, the site of the former lunatic asylum at 999 Queen Street West where he and Jones had toiled; here, miraculously, came the breakthrough I had been dreaming of. As the

3 R. Andrew Paskauskas, ed., *The Complete Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Ernest Jones, 1908–1939*.

archivist handed me a folder marked “FitzGerald,” I held my breath. Inside, I found sixty intense, confessional letters written by my grandfather in 1939–1940, the last year of his life. He was languishing in a private sanatorium in Hartford, Connecticut, being treated for depression in the wake of a failed suicide attempt. The letters were addressed to his close friend, Clarence B. Farrar, the thin, cerebral director of the Toronto Psychiatric Hospital, a forerunner of the Clarke Institute where, ironically, a generation later, my father was drugged and shocked into submission. Farrar had died in 1970 at the age of ninety-five; the letters had been donated to the archives *that very week* by his second wife, a woman over forty years his junior. To describe my discovery as “coincidental” seemed a desperately inadequate explanation.

Deciphering Gerry’s semi-legible scrawl, I strained to digest the feast all in one sitting. Even as a vice-like pain encircled my skull, in the corridors outside the cries of medicated patients echoed like the soundtrack of a gothic horror film. The letters had been written a decade before my birth, yet the tone and idiom seem so familiar, real, immediate. The distant, unknown stranger who had occupied the haunted house that was my body was suddenly made flesh before my eyes, the past bleeding freely into the present, his soul laid bare before me with a near-unbearable pathos and vulnerability. The lamentations of my grandfather, calling from the end of the 1930s, uncannily mirrored the voice of my father at the end of the 1960s—the same slow slide into mid-life crisis, the same anguished outpourings over the reversals of fortune, the loss of income and status, the upsurgings of panic and self-loathing, the helplessness, the hopelessness, the terror of being “second rate,” the paralyzing indecision about whether or not to return to work, all chased by unrelenting thoughts of self-annihilation. The pair of drowning voices thrashed inside my head, fusing and confusing, making no distinction between the separate identities of Gerry and Jack, father and son. In fact, as the voices drilled and swirled and lashed, they awakened a third voice—the sound of my own primal dread. My grandfather’s words were pulling me back to the austere Victorian nursery on Balmoral Avenue, the desert of hardwood floors where small, quizzical children, generation upon generation, are abandoned under the wheels of the repressed. I felt part of some weird trinity of father, son, and unholy ghost; it was falling to me,

the third-generation eldest son, to stand and fight.

As I read on, the mystery deepened. In one letter, Gerry wrote, “I have committed the unpardonable sin—and the penalty is death.” In subsequent letters, he kept repeating the same phrase obsessively. I felt I had made an electrifying discovery, but what did it mean? Despite his obvious passion for social justice and public service, I had found no evidence that Gerry was a religious man, so the confession of an unspecified sin seemed all the more intriguing. Were these eleven painful words the key to the puzzle? Why did my grandfather, a fifty-seven-year-old man at the summit of a glorious scientific career, martyr himself? What terrible, irresistible forces possessed him? Was it part of the same force that now drove me to chase him down?

During his harrowing year in Hartford, my grandfather was subjected to no fewer than fifty-seven insulin shock treatments, falling into a cycle of profuse sweating, painful convulsions, and deep comas. Insulin, of course, was made by the Connaught Labs. Devastated by this blunt, recently invented procedure that was eventually discredited, my grandfather, swinging between rage and despair, found himself not so far removed from the caged rabbits, monkeys, and guinea pigs sacrificed in vaccine experiments at the Connaught Labs. A novelist would hesitate to invent such an irony.

The Hartford doctors, like Farrar, actively despised Freud and any form of talk therapy, to the point of forbidding Gerry to think or say any “negative” words. When I shared copies of my grandfather’s letters with my family, my mother remarked only that she thought them “repetitive.” I replied, “Maybe he was repeating himself because no one was listening.” She looked at me blankly. I suspected Gerry’s hamster wheel cyclings had painfully evoked her years with my father, and so I let the conversation drop. She proved far more helpful when she suggested I approach John Hamilton, a former University of Toronto dean of medicine now retired in his eighties in a nursing home in British Columbia. As a young pathologist, Hamilton had known my grandfather and later instructed my father at Queen’s when he was earning his FRCP degree; he had always been *sympatico* with the FitzGerals. My mother showed me a letter that Hamilton had written her in 1992 after the death of my father: “I have often thought about Jack—his brilliance in his early medical

career and the pleasure of associating with him. I am glad that he did not survive any longer—a torment to himself and to you.” My mother had reason to suspect Hamilton was privy to the nature of my grandfather’s suicide in 1940, and she was right.

When we first met in Vancouver in 1996, the stooped, grey-haired doctor was loath to talk to me—a hauntingly familiar experience—deflecting my polite, indirect questions with a patronizing air. Only during a second visit, when I grew passionate about my need to cut through the layers of myth, if only for my own well-being, did he relent. His wrinkled face screwed up in pain as the words fell from his lips; he was a confidant of my grandfather’s attending physician, Ray Farquharson, and therefore, he knew the truth. Had I not reached Hamilton in time, the secret would have died with him.

With the shocking revelation came a wave of melting relief, an uplifting validation of my own intuitions and dreams. Yes, I had been right to doubt, to wonder, to question: the nembutol overdose was indeed a cover story. Together with the discovery of the “unpardonable sin” letters, Hamilton’s disturbing confession had thrown me a lifeline. I now believed that my father had not, in fact, taken in the full horror of his father’s demise, or if he did, he shut it out; he went to his grave believing, or wanting to believe, the Nembutal myth. For a while, I considered stopping my search right there, but Hamilton had merely set loose a new train of questions. The book I had despaired of writing for lack of hard information now lay within my grasp. I had a self-murder mystery on my hands and I felt as if I had no choice but to assign myself as the questing detective on the case.

C. B. FARRAR was my grandfather’s friend and confidant, not his psychiatrist; but soon I discovered that he did treat other members of the FitzGerald family. Even though it seemed Farrar, the virulent anti-Freudian, could do little to help his patients, I was grateful for his fastidious notes; as I scanned the pages of his clinical case files, the full, dark tapestry of my paternal legacy unravelled before me. A grandfather, two great-uncles, a cousin, an aunt, a father—all crack-ups. There was even evidence that Gerry’s father, Will, a druggist in the Ontario village of Harriston where Gerry had grown up in the 1880s and 1890s, was para-

lyzed by melancholia in his middle age. What was I to make of all these unfathomable, unpardonable sins, these sad, unpardonable sons?

Even as I tapped my findings into my computer, the spectral figure of my grandfather loomed ever larger in the darkened theatre of my dreams, as if he understood—and resisted—the aggression of my truth-seeking. More than ever, I knew he lived inside me, just as I knew that if I were to flush his shadow into the light of day, I must put words to page; I must bring out the dead. I was pressing myself into a career as a ghost-writer, sentencing myself to the making of sentences, the slow digging of the tunnel out of my prison cell. Cicero put it best: “Not to know what happened before one was born is always to be a child.”

I knew I could not face the task alone, and so each week I continued to lower myself into my therapist’s leather chair and joust with the *dramatis personae* crowding my unconscious. In my sleep, I heard fragments of muffled voices rising to my ears; slowly, tantalizing puzzle pieces coalesced bit by bit, rising from my unconscious to my conscious life. Dozens of books accumulated in piles by my bedside and I found quiet kinship with writers tilling similar soil. I came to realize that we are “the spawn of our infinitely regressive family histories,” as one author put it; every father is a son, every son a father. Across the generations, we are haunted not by the dead, but the holes left within us by the buried secrets of the father. He bequeaths his unspeakable secrets silently to the son, digging an unmarked tomb of sealed-off knowledge deep in the dirt of his unconscious. Father and son remain partners in crime, until the day the grandson awakes, and speaks.

The spirit of my grandfather, over a century after his birth, remained wedged like an anvil in the heavy space between myself and my most intimate relationships, an enemy of my life’s desires. I had much more to learn before I felt I had earned the privilege to occupy the rooms inside my grandfather’s head, to dare to imagine his last thoughts on earth, to feel and confront his presence inside me, to understand what he meant by his “unpardonable sin.” In my dreams, a bony finger pointed to the eternal, paternal sea that conspired to drown me; yet out into the riptide I swam, pulled by promises of rebirth.

My future lay in the past.

Bibliography

Jones, Ernest. *On the Nightmare*. London: Hogarth, 1931.

Greenland, Cyril. *Charles C. Clarke: A Pioneer in Canadian Psychiatry*. Toronto: Clarke Institute of Psychiatry, 1966.

Paskauskas, R. Andrew, ed. *The Complete Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Ernest Jones, 1908–1939*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.

James FitzGerald is a Toronto-born journalist and author. His first book, Old Boys: The Powerful Legacy of Upper Canada College (1994), was a controversial inside look at the attitudes and mores of Canada's ruling class.

Grief Therapy

Steven Hayward

After Mike died, our whole family started going to two kinds of grief therapy. There's individual sessions we all have with this shrink named Kasoff once a week, whether we need it or not, and also there's group therapy sessions once a week with Kasoff and a bunch of other families who have suffered a similar loss.

At the group sessions there are ten families in all. There's the couple with a sixteen-year-old kid who was killed in a Jet Ski accident, and the couple with the four-year-old kid who was killed by an unnamed viral infection. There's the man whose wife and ten-year-old kid were killed one snowy day when a tractor-trailer veered out of control on I-270 and crushed their station wagon against a guardrail, and the woman whose twelve-year-old just disappeared one day and is attending these sessions only because Kasoff told her to, though as far as she's concerned there's still a pretty good chance her daughter is going to show up again. There's a pregnant woman who already knows there's something wrong with her baby, that it's got some genetic defect where it's going to breathe for half an hour and then die. She's carrying it to full term anyway because it's the best thing, she's been told, if she wants to have children in the future. Her husband, she's told everyone, is refusing to attend the sessions.

At one of the sessions there was a woman whose daughter was raped and killed by a distant relative who buried her in his backyard. When she said this, Kasoff stood up and said he was sorry, but she had come to the wrong room, that the session she was looking for was down the hall,

"Grief Therapy" is excerpted from *Don't Be Afraid*, to be published by Knopf Canada in 2011.

near the men's washroom. This was the *accidental* death group. Right at the end of the hall, he told her, if you see the water fountain, you've gone too far.

Some of the parents are willing to talk, and some of them, like my father, say nothing and sit there brooding, looking like this is all a waste of time. Sometimes I'll look over at him and think he's going to make some kind of announcement about how incredibly fine he is, about how none of this grief therapy shit is really for him. But he doesn't, because of my mother. Because my mother is anything but fine.

And there are the parents of the three-year-old who fell off her tri-cycle. It happened one afternoon in their concrete driveway and was the kind of thing three-year-olds do all the time without the slightest consequence. There are the parents of the baby who died one night in her sleep for no reason. Sometimes the siblings of the dead kids are there, and sometimes they aren't. One time, the mother of the four-year-old kid who was killed by an unnamed viral infection brought her *other* kid, a ten-month-old who did things like coo and sit in the middle of the floor and play with car keys. But then they had to leave because looking at that baby was making the woman who was carrying her defective baby to full term cry.

Sitting there beside my father in the group sessions, her purse on her lap and dressed entirely in black like she's one of those old Italian widows you see making spaghetti in Coppola movies, my mother looks mostly lost, like someone who's forgotten her excuse or completely lost track of the way things were to go. Before the explosion my mother—Filomena Morrison—worked behind the reference desk at the library where she'd been a sort of mother to teenagers who'd been assigned research projects of one kind or another. A kind of sister to women her own age who came into the library with difficult question about difficult subjects. A daughter to old ladies who had nothing to do but book clubs and the Historical Society. She didn't have many friends but didn't seem to mind. She was our mother and she was a librarian, and that was it. She had to sit at that desk, alone, most of the time. It was a way of life. She'd grown accustomed to a methodical existence. She would get up at six and be asleep by eleven. She would insist on ordering pizza on Fridays, cook's night off. Being a librarian had everything to do with this routine: per-

sistent alphabetization makes for an ordered and orderly existence. At the group therapy sessions she sits up straight, like she's afraid of missing something or there's something she's about to say, like it's right there, on the tip of her tongue.

For my own part I sit there as still as possible and say nothing. Everyone else has their own stories and their own things to say, and Kasoff is really big on letting them all talk. The whole point of the sessions is that kids die every day. There's nothing strange about it. It's nothing to be ashamed of. Dying is one of the things that kids do, like teething or smoking dope. As far as I can tell, the only thing any of us have in common is that it's a beautiful day when it happens. It's a warm afternoon in August, sunny and eighty, when the Jet Ski crashes into the rocks, breaking open the skull of the fourteen-year-old whose name was Bruce. It's another perfect day when Campbell, the three-year-old girl on the tricycle, hits her head on the pavement which, nine times out of ten, is nothing to worry about. A beautiful day in ordinary time. The sun is shining and the sky is blue. You can smell the grass, the snow beginning to fall.

Once upon a time there were three of us—myself, my older brother Mike, and our younger sister, Vivian—I was born fifteen months after Mike and Vivian fourteen months after me. “Like birds on a wire,” my father would say. “Which is to say,” he'd add, “*almost* equidistant.”

Petey came along nearly eleven years after Vivian, an accident. Or so my father used to say, clearing his throat first, as if he were about to say something x-rated. I never knew what to do when my father was basically saying he'd thought his childbearing years were behind him but he hadn't figured in his inability to keep his hands off our mother. Most of the time I pretended not to hear. Other times I would smile in a knowing way, as if to suggest that I had somehow been in on the conception.

It was my sister Vivian who finally put an end to it. This was one night at the library when she was finishing up her shift behind the circulation desk. Our mother had got us all jobs at the library for after school and weekends. Vivian checked out the books and Mike and I shelved them. It was what we did when we weren't looking carefully at charred pieces of copper tubing for my father or crawling slowly along concrete with him, measuring the exact length and width of skid marks.

I don't know where Mike was that night, but my father had already arrived at the library to drive me and Vivian home. We'd have been out the door had it not been for Officer Stong knocking on the back door, asking to take out a fondue cookbook for his wife. My father knew him from his work as an investigator, and he'd been the one to say come in, even though the library was closed. While Vivian was getting the book, my father asked how many children he had. Three, Officer Stong replied, and said he figured that was it. My father said he figured the same, though—and here he winked—accidents did happen.

"So you didn't use a condom," said Vivian, handing over the cookbook. "Big deal."

Officer Stong took the book and held it to his chest, like a bulletproof vest.

"I wish you wouldn't speak to the police that way," my father told her, on the drive home.

"Speak to them how?" Vivian wanted to know.

"So openly like that," my father told her, "like you *know* him."

"I *do* know him," said Vivian. "You know him."

"It puts them on high alert, that's what I'm saying."

"High alert?" replied Vivian.

"Seriously Vivian," I interjected. "You don't *want* to get arrested."

"It's not *becoming* for a young lady," my father told her. "That's what Jimmy is saying."

"Is that what you're saying?"

I said it was.

"Tell the truth," she told me.

"I just don't think I'd *say* it," I told her. "That's it."

"That's *because* you're a virgin."

Like Officer Stong, I didn't know what to say.

"Come on, Jimmy," she told me, "you've got virgin written all over you."

Vivian is sixteen, a red-haired girl with blue eyes and long thin arms and legs. That night she was dressed in an oversized Frankie Goes to Hollywood T-shirt and red leggings like the ones that Molly Ringwald wears in *The Breakfast Club*. Despite being more than a year younger than I—and my sister—I couldn't ignore that there radiated out from Vivian a

new pugnacious sexiness, a glow that had never come anywhere near me. As she sat across from me in the living room later that night, slowly kicking her shoes off and flipping channels with indifference, I understood she knew what she was talking about. She'd been there and back. She knew the score and who was playing who.

IT'S THE END OF MARCH, which means I'm now almost at the end of my fourth months of looking after little Petey, of being his nanny or babysitter or whatever you want to call it. It's a job I've had ever since mid-December when I got kicked out of school and my mother made it clear she'd turned into the kind of basket case who can't look after herself, much less a four-year-old whose idea of a good time is to put on a Jacques Cousteau video and then roll around on the carpet with his toy sharks and whales pretending to be a scuba diver.

"While baleen whales eat *lots* of small animals with each mouthful of water," little Petey will say, for no apparent reason, in a bad French accent, "*toothed whales* eat them *one* at a time."

It's that kind of thing that would make my mother lock herself in the bathroom.

I thought that after Mike's funeral Petey would forget about the diver's mask and his obsession with sharks, that it would just go away. But it hasn't—if anything, it's got worse. When we were going out the door the morning of the funeral, my father tried to get him to leave the mask behind. Petey went nuts, and in the end my father let him bring it. Though Petey didn't wear it during mass, he kept it right there on the pew beside him the whole time, like he thought that at any moment the church might start filling with water. Now he never goes anywhere without that mask, including preschool. I can't say if it's normal or not, if he's lost it completely or he's the kind of four-year-old who'd have worn a diver's mask everywhere, even if a member of his immediate family hadn't been killed in some freak explosion.

One time I brought it up with Kasoff, our shrink, and instead of answering, he asked if I ever thought about putting on a diver's mask myself.

When he said that, I told him to fuck off.

He didn't look bothered by it in the least. After sitting there for

awhile and looking back at me with a vague, expressionless look on his face, he told me he got told to fuck off all the time. “You get used to it,” he said. “It happens more often than you’d think.”

Kasoff is in his fifties or something, and completely bald. He looks a little like Captain Picard in the new shitty *Star Treks*, only way taller and without the great accent. He started off thinking that he was going to be in the NBA, but somewhere along the line made up his mind that what he really wanted to do was help people. The story of how he woke up one day having decided to be a shrink is something you get told during your first session with him, how he knew he had to put basketball aside if he wanted to shape people’s lives. He has a way of saying *shape* with his big basketball hands out in front of him. It’s supposed to be comforting, the shrink equivalent of that insurance ad where the guy turns his palms up, but Kasoff’s hands move around like they aren’t really listening to what he’s saying, like they’re thinking of detaching themselves at the wrist and crushing or swallowing you whole.

It’s because of Kasoff that I’m not going to school anymore. He was the one who called Heights High and said that given the givens, I should take a leave of absence. Sit this one out and take another run at the second half of my senior year when September rolled around. I’d get an A in the classes I was in when Mike got killed. It was, as Kasoff pointed out, way better than I’d been doing. From an academic standpoint, from the standpoint of getting into college, Mike getting killed was maybe the best thing that could happen to me.

I think Kasoff was trying to be funny when he said that, but I don’t know.

It’s not like I didn’t try to go back. I went to homeroom the Monday when the school reopened—two weeks after the explosion, after the windows had been replaced—and tried to be normal. Only I got stopped by the principal on my way, who had to tell me how sorry he was. That meant I got to class late, just when the anthem was starting up, and meant I had to stand and stare up at the flag, up at the front of the classroom.

The week before, I’d tried imagining what it was going to be like, my first day back at school after the big tragedy. A number of things had come to mind, including a soundtrack. My first pick for a song to play

as I walked back into home room was “With or without You,” but I changed my mind because it’d be too obvious; everyone would *expecting* it, even roll their eyes it was so cliché. Same with “Time after Time.” Then I thought “Total Eclipse of the Heart” or else “Space Oddity” (“Tell my wife I love her very much,” I was going to say, even if it made no sense). I mean, it was enough for a mixed tape. The one song that definitely wasn’t on it, that I never would have thought of, was “The Star Spangled Banner.” It meant I had to freeze there at the front, in full view of everyone, at the moment when I saw that Jennifer McKellar—Mike’s girlfriend, or ex-girlfriend, or widow, or whatever—wasn’t there. I don’t know if she was in love with Mike or what, if it was her he was waiting for that night in the library when it blew up. I’d only shown up to school so I could ask her why she didn’t come to the funeral. My plan was to be really mad at her at first, then forgive her. We’d cry a bit, that sort of thing. She’d tell me how she’ll never get over him. Not in a million, hundred million years. I’d get it that she was talking about killing herself and I’d talk her out of it. A few years later, we’d get married. But I looked to the back of the class, and it was just her empty desk.

The anthem played on and I stood there with my hand on my heart, and was OK until the singer got to the very end of the anthem, to the part about the flag, where it asks if that star spangled banner yet waves, if after all the bombs and the red glare of the rockets, it’s still out there waving for the land of the free and the home of the brave. It’s stupid that I started crying, but that’s what happened. It was like I had won the Academy Award and couldn’t believe it, but worse. Like I didn’t even know I’d been nominated and won it anyway, and then it all just poured out of me. I mean, a lot of the kids had to look away. Atkinson had walked me out. The next day, it was the same thing, all over again. I heard later Jennifer McKellar changed schools and didn’t *ever* go back. Not that it mattered; I was acting like such a lunatic. It went on for about a week. I’d be standing there and the singer would get to that bit about the banner yet waving, and I’d lose it. Like some fucking patriotic freak.

So Kasoff made a call and I didn’t have to go back.

Two weeks later, my father told me I’d be looking after Petey. He did this one night after dinner when Vivian was putting dishes in the dishwasher and my mother was upstairs with Petey.

“You mean, like, be his nanny?”

“Is that the word for it?”

“What would you call it?”

“I’d call it getting him to his preschool in the morning and home afterwards,” he told me. “Then after that, thinking of something for the two of you to do until dinner.”

“Be his nanny, in other words.”

“If you want to call it that.”

“What does Mom say?”

“She says it’s a good idea.”

“She *said* that?”

“No,” he admitted. “She doesn’t know.”

“Why not Vivian?”

“Your sister’s looking after the meals,” he told me. “She’s doing the cooking and you’re doing the child care.”

“What do you mean I’m doing the cooking?” Vivian came over and stood in front of him. “You think I have time for that?”

“You can use the microwave,” my father told her. “That’s what I bought it for.”

Our microwave is a Litton Minutemaster, a two-foot-wide stainless steel box weighing approximately two hundred and fifty pounds. When my father bought it in 1976 for 479 dollars—an actual retail price he often repeated in connection with the observation that my mother refused to touch it—it had been near the top of the line. Like most things he did in his life, my father’s purchase of the microwave had been carried out in the name of science, an attempt to bring my mother over to his way of thinking, to show her that there was more to cooking than cooking. Before Vivian could object, he handed her a paperback entitled *Mastering Microwave Cooking*.

She looked at the book but didn’t touch it. “The greatest invention since fire,” she said, reading from the cover. “They’re kidding, right?”

Then I went upstairs with my father and told Petey and my mother. Petey was in the bath and my mother was watching him, sitting on the toilet seat, as if it were all going on at great distance from her actual location.

“It’ll be fun,” my father told Petey, “you and Jimmy.”

“Bonnie and Clyde,” said my mother.

My father ignored that.

“So,” my father asked Petey, “what do you say?”

Petey burst into tears.

“Petey,” said my father, “be a good boy.”

“Don’t cry, Petey,” said my mother. It didn’t even look like she could hear us, but I guess she might have caught on to the fact that what was happening was the mothering equivalent of having her driver’s licence revoked.

Born and raised in Toronto, Steven Hayward now lives in Colorado Springs, Colorado, where he teaches in the English Department at The Colorado College. His next novel, Don't Be Afraid, will be published in January.

Unpacking My Daughter's Library

Joan Givner

I am sitting on the floor, surrounded by books in piles and in boxes, which I am unpacking. It is every book-lover's dream—to inherit a library. Yet this is one legacy I never expected, never would have wished for, partly because at my age it is more appropriate to bequeath books than to inherit them.

Not that there is anything of great value on my bookshelves. I am an accumulator rather than a collector and my shelves have more in common with a garage sale than a library. The reference books have been rendered useless by Google; the textbooks are out of date; and the hardcovers hover between obsolescence and antiquarian value.

Nevertheless when I retired, I drew up a will making careful arrangements for the disposal of the books. If I died on an even day of the month, my elder daughter was to make the first selection: if on an odd day, the younger one. Then turn and turn about, they would divide up the whole collection. The plan was designed to prevent strife, though I knew it was more likely to end in a tug of war.

In the event, it proved unnecessary.

One July evening, nine years later, a doctor at the Queen Elizabeth II hospital in Halifax called to tell us that our elder daughter had died of a sudden allergic reaction. It is her library that I am now unpacking.

Soon after the phone call, I flew across the continent to give the eulogy at my daughter's memorial service. Afterwards, I went directly

to the house in which she had lived for the past two years. Her bedroom was just as she had left it when she walked out for the last time—a desk heaped with papers, letters, manuscripts of stories she was working on, and an overflowing bookcase. Shelves crammed with her books were all over the house. As my younger daughter said in her tribute, “The way Emily lived says much about what she thought was important. She spent little time collecting anything other than books.”

I yearned to possess those books, but even I, desperate for every relic of her life, realized that to strip the house of her books would be a cruel blow to the artist with whom she had made a home. Instead I sorted out all the manuscripts, papers, and letters, packing some to carry home in my luggage, others to send by mail. The books remained behind.

The loss of books became a source of grief that compounded the greater loss of my daughter. It also became a festering source of resentment. In one of my daughter's stories was a scene in which two lovers were separating:

She was packing her books, soft covers in one box, the critical theory in another, the antiquarian first editions in a giant milk crate.

Rick had moved up behind her. Quietly. But she could feel his presence.

“Could you leave the books here?” he asked.

“Why, Rick?”

“I like the look of them on my shelf.”

I read that passage as a description of the present situation. Jim was a visual artist, who loved art more than literature, treasured paintings more than books. He liked the look of them on his shelves! I doubted that he would ever read them, and I feared the books would be borrowed and not returned, carried outdoors and left in the rain, given away as gifts to friends. I felt that I had been robbed of something precious. Neither the sense of deprivation nor the resentment diminished over the next four years.

Then, another turn of fate! Another tragic death! Jim had started out as an idealistic painter, unconcerned that his huge colour field canvases were too large even for most art galleries. Eventually, he was driven by necessity to earn a living by painting sets for movie companies. It was an expedient course that not only compromised his art, but destroyed



Joan Givner with the library of her daughter Emily

his health. He ruined his lungs by painting without a mask to protect against the toxic fumes and died of a pulmonary thrombosis.

And so my daughter's library was mine. It had been restored to me in a way I never would have wished; it was at the far end of the continent, and in a house soon to be dismantled. Then a small miracle! Out of the wings stepped someone I barely knew, had met only once—the wife of Jim's brother, herself a writer, a book-lover, a survivor of the Eastern European devastation. She offered to catalogue the books, pack them in boxes, and ship them to me. All this she did, sending them by a courier service to ensure their safety.

Her catalogue preceded the boxes and, I saw to my shame, that I had misjudged Jim. He had been a faithful custodian and had lovingly preserved Emily's library; not a single volume was lost. The list contained hundreds of books—high school and college textbooks, special editions of her favourite authors, and multiple copies of the same books by authors whose work she had needed when she travelled. She acquired them over

and over again, wherever in the world she was, for Emily needed books, as others need food and clothing.

“A private library,” Walter Benjamin tells us, “serves as a permanent and credible witness to the character of its collector.” The library that was on its way to me contained Emily’s biography. It traced the trajectory of her life—her college courses, teaching stints in Korea and Poland, brief literary infatuations, forays into philosophy and literary theory, and her enduring passion for poetry.

Above all, it was a writer’s library. It spoke of what she had written and what she might have written, if she had lived awhile longer. A tattered paperback describing the lives of the Russian women pilots of the Second World War was the key to her story “Night Witches.” The biography of Clement Greenberg together with the catalogue for a show of Marsden Hartley’s paintings would help me understand “Fisherman’s Last Supper.” Book after book was able to yield new insights and allow me to engage once again in a dialogue with my daughter about the books we loved and the stories she wrote. I prepared for their arrival, as one might prepare for the arrival of a child, making a special space in the room where I am now sitting, clearing shelves and buying new ones.

And then, one final devastation!

Only a portion of the shipment arrived. In a panic, I made desperate calls to the parcel service. Days passed in nervous anticipation, but eventually the missing boxes arrived. The deliveryman, who was by this time taking a friendly interest in the situation, shook his head as he set them in the hallway. They felt odd and looked very strange—the sides had burst and been crudely taped back together. He stood looking down as I opened them. Instead of books, they contained heavy metal pieces that I was unable to identify. He called them “clamps.”

I flew into action, confident that the lost books could still be traced. After all, if the clamps were in my house, the books must be in someone else’s. The rightful owner of the clamps must be scratching his head at that very moment over a bunch of poetry books instead of the tools he needed to build whatever he was building. If not with him, the books must be in a shipping warehouse somewhere along the way.

I spoke constantly by phone to the representatives of the parcel service—young women called Randi, Rebecca, and Sherri. The verdict

was horrifying: the parcel service had no responsibility for the books. I should contact the agent at the shipping office from which they had been sent. Besides, they were uninsured. I protested and pleaded. Surely the payment of hundreds of dollars constituted a guarantee of safe delivery. Not so: no insurance, no responsibility. Worse still, no interest at all in the recovery of the lost items.

That verdict made no sense to me. I assembled the necessary documentation: the tracking numbers on the boxes, shipping dates, lists of the missing books, and close-up photographs from all angles of the smashed boxes and the metal clamps. Nothing unlocked the colossal indifference of the parcel service and their refusal to trace the books. In voices resembling those of automated check-out clerks at the supermarket, Randi, Rebecca, and Sherri repeated the same lines. My long-suffering lawyer explained again and again about precedence, the legal system, and the futility of suing.

For weeks the boxes of clamps stood in the hall by the front door, the parcel service showing as little interest in picking them up as it had in finding my books. Presumably, their unfortunate owner, like me, had omitted to insure them.

As time wore on, those smashed boxes of clamps took on a monumental significance. They became the terrible emblem of everything I had suffered in the last five years, and of all those who inflicted so much pain—the vendor who sold the sandwich containing the deadly allergen (Emily always asked about ingredients), the 911 operator who dispatched an ambulance too late, the paramedics who arrived unprepared to save Emily's life, the coroner's receptionist who promised the autopsy report week after week but failed to send it until I hired a lawyer. All these griefs were revived and suffered again in a great landslide of remembered griefs.

The books never appeared.

I told myself they could not have been shredded, recycled, and destroyed completely. "They must be somewhere," became my mantra. They must be in a repository of lost property, dumped in a heap, dispatched to the Salvation Army. At last, I dreamed that they were salvaged in one's or two's; that they found good homes with readers who loved them, and marvelled at the treasures to be found in Thrift stores.

So many precious books down the ages have by some evil chance

been thrown away, burned by zealots, whole libraries buried deep in the ocean or under layers of volcanic ash—the Dead Sea Scrolls, the poems of Sappho, the libraries of Alexandria and Herculaneum. Of seven centuries of poetry written by the Anglo-Saxons, little remains, save a few prayers, one great epic, some haunting lyrics, and a beautiful dream vision.

When I was twenty-one and a student of literature, I made the pilgrimage from Milan to an out-of-the-way town in northern Italy. There a trusting priest placed in my hands one of only four surviving Old English manuscripts—the Vercelli Book. All afternoon in the cool interior of the cathedral, I read “The Dream of the Rood.” It was written, not in the Latin of the learned clerics, but in the vernacular, the language of my ancestors. I deciphered the ancient script, smiling at the droll little creatures doodled in the margins by a playful scribe, and I thrilled to that simple climactic line: “Crist waes on rode.”

I wondered at the strange chance by which it came to be there, and the even greater miracle of its being there still. No one knows how it got there in the first place. Did some English nobleman, making a pilgrimage to Rome, lose it? Did he leave it there and plan to retrieve it later? Was it stolen from him? It was a book from a foreign country in an incomprehensible language. Soon its method of production was rendered obsolete by the invention of the printing press. Did it then become a curiosity? Was it valued, or just overlooked? There were so many chances for its destruction over ten centuries of plague and strife and two world wars. Yet there it was. And there it is.

Fifty years later, as I sit here among the remnants of my daughter's library, I remember that day. I hold in my hands Emily's high school copy of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. It is as precious and amazing to me now as the Vercelli Book was then. Opening it at the story of Lancelot and Elaine, I learn from the marginal notes that “black tarn” means “a glaciated lake,” and that Lancelot values honesty. In my mind's eye I see her so clearly, fifteen years old, sitting in a classroom, her head bent over the book, then suddenly laughing at the neighbour who has leaned over to scribble in pencil on the page, “Hi Emily, you twit.”

From a copy of *The Beautiful Mrs. Seidenman* by Andrzej Szczypiorski fall two photographs and a note from a friend:

Dear, dear M!
I'm sorry I'm sending this so late.
I loved the novel but this is some strange translation.
Hugs,
Kinga

I write Kinga and she tells me about the photographs. They were taken in spring at the Metropolitan restaurant, just off the main square in Cracow. Her son, Kajetan, was eating his first ice cream of the year. Emily was drinking her usual strong coffee. At the next table, Czeslaw Milosz was eating a club sandwich.

Thus every book in its own way yields up its secrets.

It seems that some small fragments always survive devastation to console us in our sorrow. They provide permanent and credible witness to times past and lives lost. They are what we find again when the fighting stops, the wars are over, the destruction ends, and the tides of ignorance and indifference recede.

They are our bulwarks against despair.

Joan Givner has written two biographies, an autobiography, several works of fiction, and the Ellen Fremedon series of YA novels. Her next one, A Girl Called Tennyson, will appear in the fall.

The Drama of the Daytime Sky

Anne Meisenzahl

Tests, machines, endless white halls, sitting still and praying
girlhood prayers, waiting again, waiting to hear results:

Good news, dear, it's all right. Breathing in with resignation,
out with fear. Meanwhile the drama of the daytime sky goes on

outside the window, beyond the glass. The wide sky watches
the heroic debate rage daily above the bay. The moon teaches

calm, lies on its back like an open lap or a bowl full
of blue, as angry gulls scream, circling its gentle curve.

All frenzy, all refusal, all wings.



The pretty older doctor jabs my nipple with a needle,
we talk about kids. The perky young one rubs my back,

smiles *Good luck*. Women are like monkeys, always
chattering about something, this time about motherhood

and puberty and time, the way it flies away even when
we're looking. I'm a body suspended. All that grounds

me is lifted on the table and into the air. There's
a sucking sound. In the metal coldness I'm floating.



The plastic surgeon draws lines and circles
and curlicues with blue magic marker on my back,

my belly, my breasts. This is where the new breast
would be; you'll look like you're twenty-five. *We'll tattoo*

*a nipple on; you'll have scar lines in the shape of an open,
unblinking eye. Don't talk to other women, he tells me.*

Too many voices, too many ways to go.
Thirteen thousand ways of looking at the blackbird of loss,

whose knife-like beak seizes you by your own personal
throat, carries you to the open field, drops you there, alone.



The night before my breast came off I took a ballpoint pen
and wrote *Good Bye* and *Thank You* on the one about to vanish

into air and *Do Not Disturb* on the other. I wore my sexy
black bra one last time and we met each other like

first-time lovers, all delight, all skin, pulling each other
into impermanent imperfect love.



I want to design a hospital of trees, IV tubes dangling
from branches, intermingled with vines and Spanish moss,

squirrels scampering on live oak and gingko and Bradford pear,
excellent medicine and fresh-squeezed juice brought on a tray

by a nurse who has time to listen. She directs your attention
to the space between the limbs where you can see the opening

sky, the way the clouds unfurl like pink bandages against
the healing blue. The breeze blankets you, you dream of rivers.

The sun on your skin works its magic while you sleep. You wake up
carved up, but restored, half what you once were, but whole.



The first time we returned to the making of love, after
the violence of the taking, after the moon fell, after the sun

sank, you held me as usual, kneaded the dough of my skin
in all the ordinary ways, as if nothing had disappeared, as if

the earth hadn't moved. You took me with you to the blessed
cave where fragile creatures are born, then die, then are born,

then die to themselves and the world, over and over again.

Anne Meisenzahl earned her MFA (Creative Writing) from Florida State University in 2009. She teaches adult education in Tallahassee, Florida, where she lives with her husband, daughter, and dog. She is a breast cancer survivor.

Migraine Sestina

Devon Miller-Duggan

First, grey fingers swarm up the back of your neck, then snow
Falls before your eyes in your den, or lights
Spit at you from the page you wanted to read, then it occurs,
And one side of what you thought was your head
Tries to secede from the other, taking more and more
Of your will to breathe with it: acres of ache.

Trolls pickaxe diamonds from your teeth, which ache.
The half world you can see is more than you want to know
About. Swelling, your brain is more
Than any bone should hold. Your tongue turns impolite—
You say the first thing in your head,
And what's in your head is, cell to cell, a curse.

You think of fresh meat, and a pack of long-toothed curs
At work on it. Your stomach starts on its own ache,
Roiling with the starved animals heaving in your head.
Once some believed this a mark of clairvoyance. Now,
We think we know better. What you're sure of is that any light
Anywhere hurts. Turn them off, speak softly. Take more

Of what you take. Getting everything wrong, your brain has mal de mer
And no where to go. MSG, bananas, chocolate, cheese—all cursed
To crash your neurotransmitters—bacon, good Bordeaux—delights
You now forgo. Other triggers find you. Your hair aches,
Your eyelashes ache, the holes pierced in your ears ache, no
Breath escapes any hole in your head

While the monster from under your bed fills your head
With enough gas for the *Hindenberg*, then more.
Behind your lids, rods and cones put on a horror show: you beg for no
More Technicolor reds. Icepacks, meditation, coffee, all the cures
That used to not work, still don't. Your toenails ache.
The long-clawed gargoyle finds your skull, alights,

Digs in. Shoot out the lights.
Bubble-wrap your head.
Sleep off the ache.
Old texts suggest a mix of mouse dung, butter, myrrh—
A rubbed, you hope, not swallowed, cure.
Expect no

Relief for hours, maybe days. You sleep, you wake, it lights
Your nerves like bombs. You know your head:
It's marred. This will reoccur.

Devon Miller-Duggan teaches English at the University of Delaware. Her first collection, Pinning the Bird to the Wall, appeared in 2008 from Tres Chicas Books.

Hospital Gown 3

Lee Schwartz

It's not an office suit,
a bridal gown,
a dancer's tutu,
or a sports uniform,

Or any garment for a special occasion.
This is no occasion.
We are all sitting in wheelchairs
in our faded checks and chevron blue

That lets the air and sun meander freely
thru the open ties and under the hem.
The simple drafts and slivers of sun
remind us how naked we are.

This is our new wardrobe,
we are all free of collars and cuffs,
ascots and belts, buttons and bling;
wearing our pain like a circus tent.

This luxurious bolt of cloth
allows us to move, to be free to pee—
to take risks, to toss in our sleep,
to never let go, holding and twisting the threads of life.

Lee Schwartz had full knee replacement surgery. She lives in Greenwich Village. Journals include the Paterson Literary Journal, the MOM EGG, and Protest Poems. She reads at Bowery Poetry Club and the Cornelia Street Café.

Painting John Brown Painting

Dagmar Dable

John Brown is an artist. John Brown is a painter. John makes paintings. They start with something. Just something. Something to break nothing. He begins. Looking at the paintings John starts a painting. The start is a clumsy stumble. A scribble. A few marks. Something to talk to and something to talk about. What do you say when you begin a conversation? Say it now. What is the something that you and the paintings talk about. What is it?

Painter

The studio is the studio John has occupied for many years. I don't know how many. Many. It is the studio of a man who has been a painter for a long time. It is the practice of a man who has been a painter for a long time. Because the paintings make themselves with John there, John makes the paintings as the paintings make themselves. Paint goes on the surface and paint comes off the surface, it goes on and comes off it goes on and comes off and this happens for a long, long time. Something turns to nothing and then becomes something again. The word *apparition* comes to mind. Maybe an image appears. Maybe John sees a face in the paint in the painting in the paint. Maybe John lets the face stay or maybe he makes it go away. He will decide and sometimes he finds it painful to decide. The daily battle between paint and image. The battle between what the paint wants to be and what John wants it to be. John works in his studio and sometimes the phone rings and sometimes people



JOHN BROWN, *Autopsy 6*, 1998–1996, oil/panel, 63.5 x 64.5 cm, private collection.

drop by to chat. Between interruptions John works. Sometimes John makes his own interruptions because John likes interruptions. John works between interruptions, keeping the paintings always in his peripheral vision. John works and works and works and then he goes home and makes supper for Herb. John has known Herb for a long time and every morning John gets up and goes to the studio and paints and every day he goes home and makes supper for Herb. All this time the paintings change every day and become other paintings. They are paintings that change every day, and at some point they stop.

When I see John Brown he talks a lot. He says a lot about what he is thinking about and reading about and he says it in a string of words and they are pretty continuous. John talks a lot but the work of John

Brown eludes language. The work of John Brown is the work that we do when we work as we work as we do what we do. You can't really talk about that work of John Brown. What is there to say? John Brown starts a painting and the painting makes itself and gets made by him and through him and there are many things that have to happen in order for the painting to be made. And then there are many things we have to do to make John Brown's paintings. To make paintings for John and through John and to John. To love and like John's paintings. To hope for sublime things and unreal things and real things. There are things that are not things but are assuming thingness. Thing and no thing. The paint, especially those tiny repetitive marks, gives shape and space to a painting that is not yet a painting, that is thing and not thing and has thingness. John Brown's paintings are a sequence of nots. Not being a thing too much. Being a thing a little. Removal as a strategy for becoming. John and Herb spend a lot of time in museums in Europe looking at paintings. Sometimes when John talks he says Velázquez, Duccio, Goya or Romanesque, Byzantine or ex-votive paintings. John also says Grimm's fairy tales, Samuel Beckett, Frankenstein, and maybe Gertrude Stein. John Brown reads a lot and looks at many films and many museums and listens to a lot of music. John looks at pictures and hangs pictures on the walls of his studio. Sometimes they are pictures of bodies, medical diagnostic texts, plane crashes, anatomy drawings, or Kim, the leader of North Korea. John talks about human genomes and Frankenstein and John says it's the reanimation of life and how science and anatomy help us imagine ourselves in the world and define what we are in the world. John looks at the inside of the body. The inside of the body pictured through technologies and the utopian dream of regeneration, these utopian dreams, these modernist utopian dreams that John is suspicious of. The miraculous body, the body that has been interceded for and the body of science, the myth of religion, the myth of science. All these ways of approaching the body, the body of knowing and not knowing the body. In the autopsy paintings you go inside the body, the magnified body, the secret body, the body inside you. And sometimes the paintings are cut, just cut off. Sometimes, a painting is finished with a power sander. This removal, this searching, unearthing where you have been, what you have done, searching the strata of your own history,

John searching the strata of his own history, his body's history, created through some sort of story that he told himself, of all the stories that we tell ourselves.

Painting

John begins by scribbling on the surface and sometimes John begins with a picture. John must begin with something because he must have something to take away. And when he begins with a picture it is a picture that has fascinated John for a long time. So he begins with a picture. As soon as John begins he begins to take the picture away. Scraping off paint, putting on paint. Affirm, deny. Tiny marks on an epic surface. Then John forgets the picture and releases the picture and John just paints and scrapes and paints and scrapes and paints and scrapes. Then John scrapes and paints every inch over and over, scraping and unscraping, painting and unpainting navigating downward. Stratigraphy. Digging down, unearthing, resurfacing, John finds the image again. John finds the image. The image finds John. The image is the structure and the image is just the image but now the image is John's and has come from John's body. John has felt the image by not feeling it and John has looked at the image by not looking at it and then the image is John and John is the image. And then the image is me and the painting is my body. And the medical text, the diseased body, the miraculous body, the falling tower, the burning airplane is John's body and is in his body and the picture is me and in my body. And John wonders the inside of his body and I wonder mine and then the painting is the queer body the not queer body, the male body the not male body, the visceral blood spill, pain body the puke body and the body body body. The fragile body, the penetrating and penetrated body, the vulnerable body, the miraculous body that heals itself and continues. The imperfect body. John's partner lost his eye and John's brother lost his leg and John painted. John painted paintings for his brother and his partner, like those ex-votive paintings, but John is not a believer. John is suspicious of religion. Religion, perfection, utopia, and modernism are all things John is suspicious of. John does not believe in authenticity but he believes in believable artifice. John has pictures in his studio. John has pictures of bodies and cars and towers and diseased skin. Sometimes the pictures are newspaper photographs and sometimes they are pictures of paintings. Some of the pictures of paintings are paintings

John saw in museums in Europe. Sometimes they are very important pictures, sometimes they are unimportant pictures.

When John finishes the painting John knows the painting is finished because it has left the studio. John begins again with a picture and then paints with his back to the picture. When he paints as he paints his body is touching painting. John is distracted while he paints, John is restless and doubtful with exquisite torture. John begins again each day and each day he goes home to make dinner. John Brown is a painter and he has been a painter for a very long time. Then the paintings will hang in Olga Korper Gallery and people will come and see John's paintings and people will drink wine and talk and see paintings and maybe take paintings home.

Paintings

Later and before, I see paintings at Korper's. I see a painting and I see the inside of my body and I remember my body at Korper's. I remember the miraculous vulnerable body, the pain body, the joy body. I know and unknow my body at Korper's. When the body encounters the body of the painting, what is the name for that something that stops us in our tracks? In that stillness you encounter your own body. As though you could perform your own autopsy. If I tell you what happens as I tell you words slip away. Could I say tiny inner vibration, small tremor, gut churning, tremble? Geographies of spleen or cartilage or bone? Veins bile mucus liquid hair brain retina glands marrow fat fingers finger tips? Clumsily I attempt visceral. Clumsily I try to say what I see when I see as I look. But looking I have nothing to say. Looking at the paintings I think no words, though vaguely I know I'm alive. Like Peter Falk in *Wings of Desire* saying to his invisible angels, I can't see you but I know you're there, I can not grasp it. There might be a story and the story might be a story of a lost eye or a lost leg or the story might be a story of love and fear and disease. I don't know. I don't know what stories the painting might tell if the painting told stories because the painting refuses. And yet I know the story is there or has been there and may be there again. The story knows no story. The story is performing its own autopsy, removing layer by layer the skin the flesh the veins the form. It is described for you and known by you and you are feeling so vague so precise. And broadly as you attend to the heart of the matter it is best if you don't look directly.

You remove the spleen the heart the lungs the aorta and carefully each tiny capillary each minute nerve, as you travel through the layers, as you look at the paintings. We are in the gallery and I encounter the paintings and I look at the paintings, still and not still, mute and not mute, performing some sort of alchemy, some sort of order of surprise. They make me feel.

Dagmar Dable is a visual artist and a professor in the Department of Art at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta.

At the Gallery

Helene Berman Fallen

(For Betty Goodwin 1923–2008)

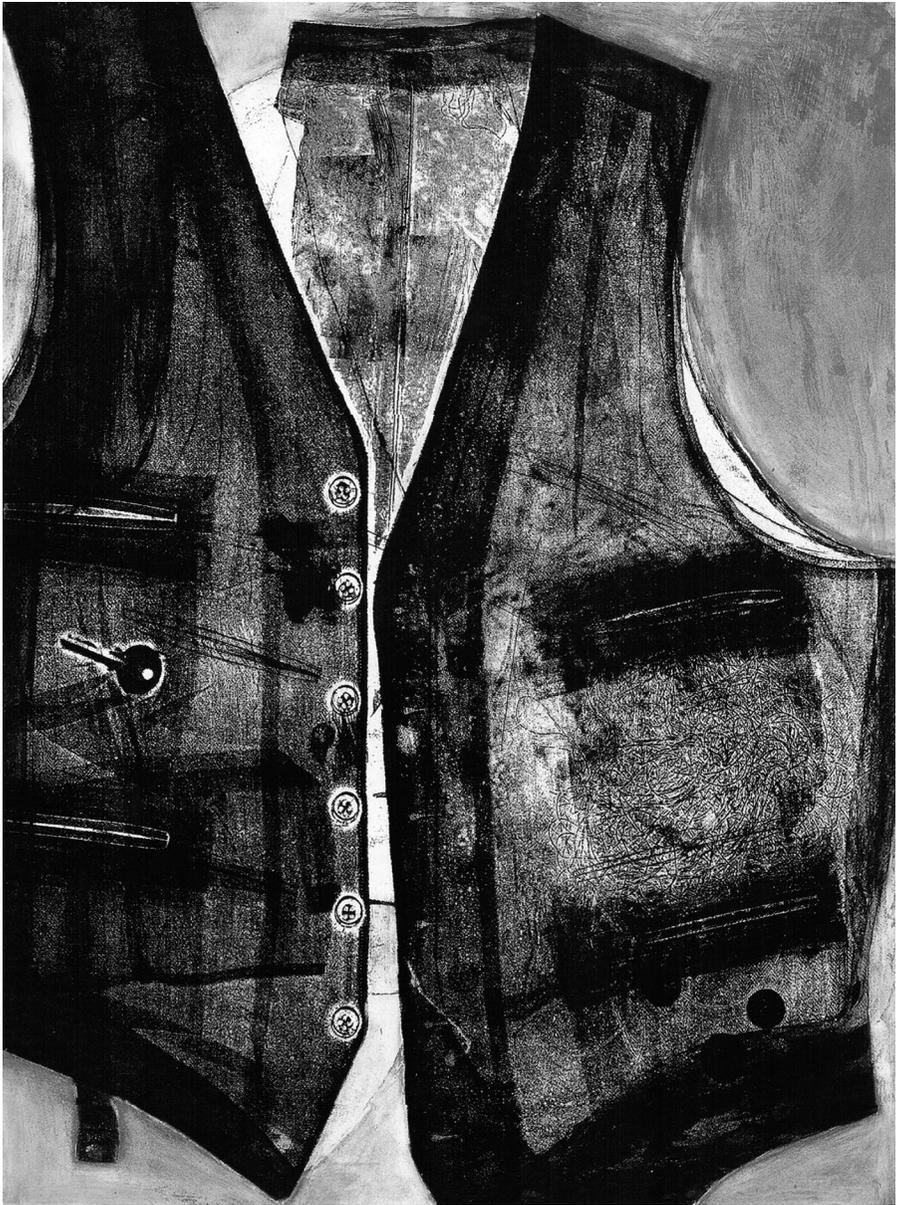
On the fifth floor, one of the white and bright
true Gehry floors, in a dissonantly quiet alcove,
your works reside. The floating figures and strange boxes;
the prints of gloves you pressed on paper; the tarpaulin—
an outside object you spied—brought into your studio,
blackened and further ravaged until it was definitely your own.
My companion and I scanned the space and moved on.
That was just days before your death. And ironically one of the days
celebrating the birth of Toronto's transformed Gallery.

The next week I wandered alone into a first-floor space,
a room focused on women as artists or models or sometimes
muses. And there it was—amidst the oils and pastels and
other mediums—your emblematic work: *the vest*:
this one assembled in muslin, a most primitive cloth—
dark stitches seaming its parts and ragged edges carefully folded.
It was as though you'd found a pattern lying on the floor
of your too-soon-dead father's Montreal factory; then washed it,
pressed it, and carefully mounted it on board with no-nonsense nails.
Then glassed it in for hanging.

But it wasn't just the vest that drew me: It was the fabric;
its pale plainness, its careful positioning, reminding me of
the historic death dresses wound about Egyptian princesses
or the burial garb of my recently lost mother and other Jewish women.
Perhaps even you now, cosseted in white and seemingly at peace.
I left quickly, feeling your testy spirit was not there.

It was on the fifth floor. In black and red and white. In pencilled and inked lines that lead who knows where. Somewhere. And in photos—a petite woman beautifully attired, her narrow face half covered by dark-rimmed glasses, looking triumphantly ahead or sideways at one of her massive mid-life installations. All losses subsumed by the whirlwind of making art.

Since her arrival in Ontario, Helene Fallen has created the CBC radio documentary “Anne Wilkinson Remembered,” the series Bookrounds for WFMX-FM, and essays on Dr. R.M. Bucke. Poetry and family have been a constant.



BETTY GOODWIN, *Vest Three*, 1970, etching, edition of ten, 59.2 x 45 cm

Battleground, 1992

Carolynne Van Der Meer

ABVD

Adriamycin
named after the sea
a burnt colour that looks
like a terse word
indicated as red, not quite
sharp with an edge
of the earth
I am at war with it
“red devil” is what they call it
see it injected
feel the waves of nausea as it is pushed
into my body
it is making me a martian, an alopeciac
travels jagged through my blood
taking my hair with it

Bleomycin
colourless
the Japanese launched
a year after my birth
bomb whose birth staves off my death
after-effect: pulmonary fibrosis
lungs constrict, strangling
another kind of death
inject anabolic steroids
but I don't get to feel that rush

there are sores in my mouth, blood, lesions
everything tastes wrong
“Magic Mouthwash”
for the fallout shelter of oral caverns
a brief respite, but my nails
darken, become ridged
fall out of my toes, no respite for them
even 15 years later

Vinblastine
sin blast me
my silent joke, never spoken
another colourless poison
first isolated by men called Noble and Beer
names unlike their protégé, found
in a Madagascar periwinkle plant
so pretty and exotic
so nasty and toxic
punching me
as it steals platelets
leaving lovely bruises to remind
grafting to intestines, taking them
on a ride, undulating stomach
I want to vomit but the periwinkle plant is so pretty, I
should just be thankful and
forget its hateful swoooooosh
oh, the rollercoaster

DTIC or dacarbazine
but it is DTIC to me
DTIC DETOC my body in DETOX
the irony that toxins detoxify
does not escape me
nor the laughter, still stuck in my throat
a cytotoxic drug, impeding the formation
of more tumours

A R S M E D I C A

it razes me
to nothing
pale yellow, insidious
it slides through the tube
like an albino snake, and when it reaches
its point of entry, leaves its bite
burns the thin skin stretched
across my portacath, tiny venomous treads
along my veins
addicted to life, see the track marks
DTIC DETOX me

ABVD me
back to life

Corkscrew

“That’s invasive,” she says, just a bit sarcastically.

“Of course it is,” the doctor answers, as he pulls the needle from her backside.

He doesn’t know it and she doesn’t want him to see, but she’s biting her wrist to stifle the pain, to suffocate the gut-wrenching reaction, the muffled sobs.

“It’s like a corkscrew,” she says as she looks at the instrument.

“Think of it as your fine wine I’m extracting, then.”

She hates him just then, this man who is supposed to heal her. But she is full of hate, full of bitterness. This can’t be happening.

“Okay,” he says. “Get ready.”

And she wonders how he can say this. Has he ever had one of these? Has he ever had the bone screwed out of him, the marrow sucked away? Get ready my ass, she thinks. And then chuckles despite herself, since that’s exactly the place from which he’s doing the extracting.

Carolyn Van Der Meer is a Montreal journalist and PR practitioner who teaches at McGill University. Her work has been published in Bibliosophia, Canadian Woman Studies, Carte Blanche, and Helios, and is forthcoming in the WOW! Anthology.

The Cancer Poems

Eileen Moeller

auditioned in my head,
a whole book of them
while I waited for the surgeon to come
tell me you were out of danger.

They danced and sang as if their lives depended on getting the job,
flirted with me like dolled up little kids.
See what a hooper I am? What a belter?
Pick me, oh please pick me!
Let me be the one
to make you forget.

They even offered to type themselves
if only I'd let them.

We'll make you a star, they egged and mugged,
patting me on the back and nodding
with the certainty of the desperate.

We'll make something good out of this yet!
The doctor'll call any minute, Hon.
The tumour will be miniscule
and your hubby good as new.

*We're here for you, Babe, just pick up the pen.
Pack up all your cares and woe,
here we go, scribblin' low:
Bye, Bye, cancer.*

Eileen Moeller lives in Philadelphia, PA. Her poems have appeared in the Comstock Review, Feminist Studies, Melusine, Paterson Literary Review, Blue Fifth Review, and Philadelphia Stories. Her blog "And So I Sing" is at <http://eileenmoeller.blogspot.com>.

How to Be Allergic to Everything

David Schleifer

Being allergic to everything is expensive, time-consuming, and inconvenient, like picking the dirt off ten pounds of fresh leeks or degreasing veal stock. You may choose to endure those feats of culinary perseverance, but you cannot choose to be allergic to everything. Some dither between the rabbit ballotine and the tuna tartare, but you will not be asked to select an occluding throat or asthmatic lungs over chronic itching and high-velocity diarrhea when you become allergic to everything. Some dedicate weeks to learning the vagaries of Oaxacan moles or comparing bibimbaps, but when you become allergic to everything, entire cuisines and innumerable permutations of flavour will be eliminated from your erudite consideration. Gourmets choose to practise their hauteur; they live for their pedantic opinions. But when you become allergic to everything, you will surrender yourself to strictures far more demanding than taste.

How will you attain this unparalleled degree of culinary acumen? Just as the *au courant* chef surrenders her ragout to season and terroir, the circumstances that make you allergic will fall beyond your control. You may enjoy the accident of being born into a family in which everyone is allergic to something, a stroke of luck akin to being born into a family of great restaurateurs. If your mother has a well-publicized anaphylactic reaction to crab or your grandmother (claims to have once) fainted from sipping a garlicky broth, you will associate food with danger from

an early age. If you lack such venerable provenance, your immune system could nonetheless be permanently skewed by great lashings of antibiotics dispensed for minor childhood ailments. Perhaps you'll become a teenage vegetarian, encumbering your digestion with nuts, fruits, and beans for several indignant, flatulent years. Or you could inhale incinerated copy machines, airplane fuel, and pulverized concrete on a lovely September morning, which would stick in your throat and stress your organs for many subsequent years. However you become allergic to everything, you will likely be slow to grasp the extent of your pressing new need for discernment. You may require the stern instruction that can be provided only by an evening in the emergency room after a casual week-night supper of *farfalle e ceci*. I advise you to cower in your apartment and subsist on rice, blanched cabbage, and tea for several weeks. Spend an afternoon discarding those suddenly alarming foods—pomegranate molasses, toasted sesame oil, chickpea flour, artisanal miso pastes, and other exiled flavours—before gently beginning to explore the contours of your new sensibilities.

No taster can reliably identify every incarnation of Grenache, nor can you truly be allergic to absolutely every food. Instead, you must be allergic to the proper combination of plants and animals in order to appear as though you were allergic to all of them. If you become allergic to soy, for example, you will find that most American foods are prepared with soybean oil, allowing you to happily skip the entire centre of the grocery store, all twenty-four-hour diners, every fast food joint, and many other obesity distribution centres. But a soy allergy alone would fail to create sufficient constraint. Combine an allergy to soy with a severe sensitivity to seafood, however, and you will exponentially contract the range of foods that your body can tolerate. Asia will be out. Catches of the day will be sunk. And you will never again have to suffer through dinner with those tedious individuals who are allergic to wheat and dairy. Once you dispense with a major commodity crop and its complementary fauna, the additional foods to which you are allergic will be like the elegant accessories that transform a well-tailored frock into an utterly bewitching evening ensemble. If you are allergic to nuts, for example, you can have terribly serious conversations with flight attendants in which you generously grant them permission to serve peanuts to

your seatmates. If you are allergic to fruit—all fruit!—the farmer’s market in summer will be a louche orgy at which you remain stoically chaste. If you develop an allergy to beans, you need no longer worry about the authenticity of a burrito, feijoada, or cassoulet. And if you harbour an allergy to seeds, then the sesames and poppies rioting in a display of sandwich rolls will require you to seek a considerably more orderly establishment for lunch.

You may still dimly recall the innocence of unremarkable antediluvian meals. Did you eagerly lick melting peanut butter from the edge of a hot bagel? Would you have gamely bitten into any crummy bonbon left in the Whitman’s sampler? Could falafel have represented anything besides impending doom? Put away childish things, *mon vieux*. Now you must plot each meal with precision. Scrutinize the list of ingredients on every packaged food and reject all but the most unpolluted offerings. Scan every menu for the offending ingredients, which invariably assert themselves in rude torrents. Become the customer who quizzes the waitress about the oil in which the Milanese is fried or the dressing with which the salad is tossed. Did the tongs that turned the salmon besmirch the veal? Is there almond flour in those pretty little tuiles? A dash of anchovial Worcestershire sauce in the jus, perhaps? The gourmet decides to learn bits about those foods he finds interesting, but your investigations are non-negotiable preludes to every act of consumption. Secret ingredients and Limburger surprises cannot compromise your precise classification of the world into safe and unsafe. And your body will promptly notify you of any error, precipitating an inelegant scramble for the antihistamines, steroids, inhalers, and epinephrine, all stored in the handy *mise en place* without which you dare not leave the house.

Every fluorescent jaunt through Penn Station will remind you how narrow a slice of the American diet is acceptable to your unforgiving corpus. The insipid drone of vegetable shortening, *née* soybean oil, in a horrid little muffin would not merit waiting glumly for the Benadryl and prednisone to kick in while the train conveys you to the mouldy beach. Danger is the spice of your allergic life, but you will eventually develop an elite network of purveyors who can provide something reliably edible. Like the chowhound who discovers crispest cuy in deepest Queens, you will proselytize about previously unknown delights like Fritos, made

with a pristine combination of corn, corn oil, and salt. Scrap your plans for a vacation on Ha Long Bay, but return gratefully to the unsung deli that carries the one flavour of the one brand of packaged cookies that you can confidently consume. All of the restaurants near your office may be too cheap to use olive oil or butter, providing a built-in excuse to decline lunch with colleagues too lazy to trek a few extra blocks on your behalf.

With so few culinary citadels to shelter you from the thousand tiny daggers angling to swell your throat and strain your lungs, you will likely hunger most for the foods you cook yourself. Your omniscience regarding your homemade soup, scone, or daube will make those dishes immeasurably more gratifying than the city's most sought-after *amuse-bouche*. And with a narrower range of choices available, your palate may perceive subtler variations of flavour, texture, and technique. The bloody, ferrous flavour of a fresh egg makes breakfast at home thrillingly barbaric when brunch in a restaurant could be so dull and deadly. The deeply developed crust on your patiently browned pork satisfies more than any ingenious chef's embellishment. Concocting your own vinegar, preserving lemons, or nurturing yogurt cultures will become perfectly reasonable expenditures of effort when orange juice, lentils, nutmeats, and take-out menus no longer monopolize your pantry.

The gourmet derides most foods as trash because someone taught him to regard a select few as desirable. When you become allergic to everything, discernment will be a matter of survival. You may become a better cook, an unwelcome houseguest, and a considerably less spontaneous date. Your conceptual maps of time, taste, and geography will be indelibly redrawn. And because so many meals will clamber to be your last, being allergic to everything will make you treasure every bite.

David Schleifer will receive his PhD in sociology from New York University in 2010. He is allergic to almost everything. He apologizes to Mark Bittman for stealing the title of his well-loved cookbook.

Morning Report

Andrew Kirk

I wake to the chatter of the C95 morning show and reach over to press the snooze button. Or try to reach over. My arm feels detached, lazy, not wanting to listen to me. I try again but the arm just lies there. I bring my left hand across and grasp the right wrist, lifting the misbehaving right hand in front of my face. It looks all right but, try as I might, I can't will it to move. I try to sit up and can't. Although my left leg moves normally, the right seems to be in league with the hand and won't obey me. An icy buzz runs up my spine. I must be having a stroke, I realize frantically. No one else is in the house. I need to call for an ambulance. I roll over toward my right and reach over with my good hand to pick up the phone but succeed only in knocking the handset loose. It clatters onto the floor and the rest of the telephone follows. It's out of reach now. I'll have to get out of bed. I roll further toward my right and topple off the bed, my temple thudding onto the floor. I wince, my eyes water, and flashes of light cloud my vision for a moment. I take a deep breath and roll further to the right. I am able to pick up the receiver and hold it to my left ear. The reassuring hum of a dial tone. At least something's working normally. But now how can I hold the phone while I dial? I place the receiver on the cold hardwood beside me and reach over to dial 911. The buttons on the phone are unfamiliar. They should make sense but something's askew. I know how to call 911; it's a simple thing to do, but the face of the telephone stares blankly back at me, confusing, some mishmash phone from an alternate universe. A wave of panic rises from somewhere in my belly. The image of my father in the nursing home bed he spent his last seven years in flashes into my mind. God, no, don't let

this be happening to me too. All right, I take another breath, be calm. My pulse pounds in my head. A dripping wetness creeping from my right temple tells me I'm bleeding from where I hit the floor. Take your time. Think this through. I can use speed dial and call Jill. She'll still be feeding the kids breakfast. But which button gets her? The keypad refuses to resolve itself into anything meaningful. I punch a button randomly, desperately. I hear my other daughter's voice, "Hello?"

I try to cry out, "Deb, for God's sake, call me an ambulance. I'm having a stroke," but all that comes out is a strangled "Aaah."

"Hello?" Deb asks again.

I summon my resources and manage, "Deb."

"Dad?" she asks, her voice rising.

"Deb," the best I can do.

"What's wrong? Are you sick?"

I want to answer her. It should be easy. I know how to answer her but the words are stillborn. "Deb," I say again.

"Dad, something's happened. Please don't worry. I'm going to hang up and call you an ambulance." A click and the phone dies. I let go and it drops to the floor, the impact of grey plastic on red wood echoing across the room.

I'm goosebumps all over and tears well in my eyes. No, this can't happen to me. I can't endure what my father did. I haven't the strength for an existence like his.

I close my eyes and wait for the ambulance.

Drew Kirk has published fiction in CMAJ, CJNS, Transition, and spring, and has broadcast on CBC Radio 1's SoundXchange. In his day job, he's professor and head of Neurology at the University of Saskatchewan.

The Decision

Urve Tamberg

Mary had always been so careful, especially in the last few years. The edges of the rugs were tacked down so she wouldn't trip. Unfashionable crepe-soled shoes kept her from slipping. Her faithful walker accompanied her everywhere in the small apartment. And she had six phones, seven including the cordless one she usually carried with her in the pocket of her vest.

But today she had hit the floor like the old person she was.

Her ears rang with the echo of metal clashing against tile and shattering glass. Mary groaned as she lay prone, limbs splayed, and her left cheek squashed against the cold tile floor. She opened one eye, then the other and fought back a wave of panic. Late summer wildflowers were strewn across the hallway while the wheels of her walker spun in the air above the water on the floor. Her good crystal vase had broken into a thousand slivers. As had her dignity. And her future.

Her right hand shook as she tried to lift it to brush a tear away from her eye. No way. Her hand collapsed back onto the tile and the tear dripped to the floor, followed by another. God, it really hurt. What the hell had she done to herself?

She breathed. In and out. Again.

After a few moments of focused inhale and exhale, Mary calmed her galloping heart and began to connect with the rest of her body. She gingerly tested the major joints. Ankles creaked. Toes wiggled. Fingers—no worse than before. Wrists. The right one twinged but moved this time. Thank goodness she hadn't broken her wrist. Right shoulder. Bearable.

Left shoulder. She forced left shoulder to move as her left cheek stayed mashed against the floor. An effort but nothing new. Yet.

Damn! The one day she didn't have her portable phone with her. What had she been thinking? She picked up her head and turned it side to side, feeling like a fish out of water, gasping for air. She brought both arms forward to brace herself on her elbows. She would have to drag herself to the phone.

As she attempted to pull her knees toward her chest, pain exploded through her right hip and splintered across her lower back. Oh, please don't let it be her hip. Her friend Susan broke her hip last year at the tender age of eighty-one when she fell preparing dinner. Her neighbour found her the next day, only when she didn't answer the routine morning "Are you still alive?" phone call. Then came weeks of treatment and rehabilitation. Wheelchair, walker, cane, raised toilet seat, and personal care by strangers. Now, like a car that had undergone a major overhaul, she was good for another 20,000 kilometres.

Mary's pain smouldered but she managed to move her hip a smidgen. Through the blur of her tears, she eyed the phone on the other side of the room and calculated the distance across the tile and carpet. Deep breath. Lifting her head and torso just enough, she inched her arms forward and then, like an awkward sphinx, managed to brace some of her weight on her elbows. One elbow scraped forward, then the other. Hallelujah, the phone was getting closer. Then, like a sail in a faltering breeze, she floundered and collapsed. I'd make a lousy soldier, she thought, her cheek smushed against the now-warm tile. Besides, how does one fight against becoming feeble in old age?

A few simple steps to the phone had become a physical and mental marathon. The table beside the sofa seemed as far away as her youth.

Bette Davis said it all with "Getting old is not for sissies." Mary could think of only one ancient non-sissy, a ninety-three-year-old Hindu gentleman who had started to run marathons as a cure for boredom after his wife passed away. And what about that ridiculous woman who had twins at the age of sixty-three? Wonder if she breastfed the little darlings? As her granddaughter would say, "What a freak!"

If she made it to the phone, whom would she call? 911? Calling an ambulance wasn't like hailing a taxi. She couldn't tell them where to go.

The paramedics would take her to the nearest hospital accepting patients. She didn't want to go to any hospital, only to her favourite one downtown. It was unlikely the paramedics would accept directions. No, turn left onto Eglinton, then go over to Avenue Road and go south. Yes, you can make a left at the lights.

A more likely scenario with the ambulance flashed through her mind.

Red flashing lights and sirens broadcasting her fate to the entire apartment building. The ambulance skidding to a halt in front of the main doors. The paramedics careening through the hallways and then trussing her up like a Thanksgiving turkey on the stretcher. Curious eyes peering between partially open doorways and through peepholes. Then the phone calls would begin among the residents. Did you see who it was? Just last month she fell, you know? Poor dear, she really could use some help. Did you know she has a heart condition? Oh, my. Such a shame. We'll have to find another fourth for bridge.

More deep breathing and then, armed with oxygen, Mary continued to inch toward the sofa. Finally, she rested at the edge of the area rug with her hands poised like pale spiders against the Oriental carpet. Frayed cuffs circled her wrists.

Mary wore her old striped shirt and tan pants. Damn, why hadn't she put on nicer clothes? As she grew older she'd promised her wardrobe would never succumb to age and polyester. But here she lay in a crumpled brown heap on a dusty floor.

She had always envisioned her experience in Emergency quite differently.

She would be reclining on the stretcher waiting for the physician. The orange blanket used by the paramedics would complement her hazel eyes. Her elegant but casual outfit would reveal her as intelligent and stylish. The nurse would admire her heavy gold bracelet resting beside her plastic hospital one. Her fresh lipstick would stain the thermometer as the nurse checked her temperature. Although her features would be etched with pain, she would still radiate an elegant charm as she clutched the blanket with newly manicured nails. A handsome doctor of a certain age, concern in his deep blue eyes, would perform his assessment. How old are you? No, really. Do you live alone? What happened? Where

does it hurt? Here? Here? We'll run a few tests and I will personally get you something for the pain. Stat. Brave Mary.

Well, scratch that thought. Stupid Mary. Mary fall down and go boom. She grunted, groaned and heaved toward the distant telephone.

Maybe she could call her friend Dolores. But truth to tell, what could Dolores do other than make her a cup of tea and offer platitudes? Mary had other friends in the building but she generally kept her distance from the active social scene. How many times could one discuss the wonders of over-the-counter laxatives? And the latest cholesterol-lowering medication? Or even worse, endless prattle about the accomplishments of people's children and grandchildren. Wasn't there anyone interesting alive over the age of eighty?

She should probably call her daughter Britt. But Britt's concern exhausted her and she would insist a trip to the hospital was in order.

Mary continued to edge forward on her elbows. Her lower back burned and her hip throbbled but she would be damned if anyone was going find her sprawled on the floor like roadkill.

They shot horses, put down dogs, and flushed fish down the toilet. Once in a while she conjured up a James Bond-like approach to death. A tablet slipped under the tongue and poof, gone while dressed in an elegant sapphire evening gown after sipping a glass of champagne. When they found her, they'd wonder which black-tie gala event she had attended. She pictured the paramedics gazing at her, then gently transferring her dead body onto the stretcher. What a peaceful way to go, one would say as he tucked the dress under her so it wouldn't catch in the wheels. She must have been a fascinating lady, the other would murmur. Wonder who the lucky guy was. He'll be devastated.

The last time they took her to the Emergency department a few months ago, they asked her which nursing home she came from. Idiots. And the nurses called her Dear.

Two years ago when she had pneumonia, she'd heard the Emergency doctor inquire whether heroic measures were to be taken. At the time she lived in a bungalow, did all her own shopping and housekeeping, and even shovelled the snow. Idiots.

The carpet tickled her nose when she laid her head down to catch her breath. One for the money, two for the show, three to get ready . . . Mary

twisted just a bit to lift her right shoulder and elbow off the floor. The entire arm trembled as she raised it high. Her fingers brushed the phone.

Salvation.

And four to go . . . With clenched teeth and tears in her eyes, it took all her strength and determination to grab the phone. Spent, she rested on the carpet, phone clutched in her right hand.

More breathing. In. Out. Again. Repeat until the pain ebbed.

Only a few minutes had passed since she had taken the vase to the kitchen. Why, with arthritic fingers and a wobbly gait, had she decided to carry the vase? One slipper remained on her foot. The other one lay in a sodden mound in the midst of the flowers.

The slippers must be thrown in the garbage, even though the brown velvet ballet style made her feet appear graceful and dainty. Britt warned her they didn't provide enough support. That conversation played out like a broken record. She usually concentrated on picking up her feet so they didn't get caught. Or maybe today her heart skipped a beat. It did that sometimes, even with the medication.

She knew all her medications and their side effects better than her doctor did. She had seventeen different prescriptions. All from the same doctor. Medications for her heart (too weak), for her blood (too thick), her blood pressure (too high), and her bones (too thin). To combat her depression, and to help her sleep. To build bone, control pain, augment her thyroid output. Medications to make her happy. And medications for her medications.

Should she tell the Emergency physician she occasionally used marijuana for pain? Perhaps not. Definitely not with her daughter present. She could handle a lecture on the slippers. She tried to imagine a lecture on pot from her daughter.

The Tylenol #2 kept her neck and shoulder pain at a steady simmer, but once in awhile she needed more relief. Smoking pot seemed so juvenile and clichéd. But much to her surprise, marijuana had worked. At her age, one didn't argue with success.

When the local news channel praised the virtues of marijuana for chronic pain, she thought, why not? What had she to lose? It wasn't like she was going to party all night. The pot would be used strictly for pain, in the privacy of her bedroom. It had been remarkably easy to get. A cas-

ual elevator conversation with an upstairs acquaintance led her to the janitor. Fifty bucks later, she scored.

Mary wondered what she'd say to Britt. No, honey, I don't inhale. Yes, sweetheart, it really is a bridge club every Tuesday night.

She lay there for a long time, staring, thinking, and breathing. How had she turned into an old sissy, unsafe on her own crepe-soled two feet and smoking pot in secret?

Should she call her daughter? Britt always came without hesitation and without complaining. But Mary could see the look in her eyes. Eyes that began to question Mary's ability to live alone and make decisions.

Mary closed her eyes. Well, this decision she could manage. She needed an advocate and an ally if she was going to go to the hospital. Old age wasn't so bad, considering the alternative. And she wasn't about to go into a hospital by herself, an old person. They would ask if there was anyone they could call. As if she couldn't recite her medical history and medications by heart. Idiots.

She shuddered, cleared her throat, placed the phone on the floor and pushed the numbers. Mary mentally started to make a list of things to take with her to the hospital as she waited for Britt to pick up the telephone on her end. Perfume, the lilac pashmina (hospitals were always chilly), a couple of books, and a light bathrobe (those backless gowns!). Perhaps Britt could help her change her old striped shirt for her navy cashmere sweater before they left. The hideous tan pants couldn't be changed. Besides, the orange blanket would cover them anyhow.

"Hi, Britt. It's me. I've had a fall." Mary waited for the barrage of questions. "No, I'm OK. My hip hurts like the blazes . . . I don't think it's broken . . . Well, maybe I should get an X-ray just to make sure . . . Yes, I'll wait." Reaching for the lipstick she always kept in her bottom vest pocket, she continued. "Yes, we'll go to the hospital if we need to . . . But not until you help me get my clothes, toiletries, and other things I may need in case they decide to keep me."

Urve Tamberg has worked in health care for many years and cheers for the elderly who struggle to maintain their independence. She blogs about caregiving and caregetting at [Bedside Manners](http://utamberg.wordpress.com/) found at <http://utamberg.wordpress.com/>.

The Competition

Ann Ireland

Chapter 1

Eleven years ago, Toby was the one to beat. He strode onstage shaking his dreadlocks, luthier-made guitar tucked under one arm like a surfboard, big smile on his face. The spotlight held his form as he approached centre stage, a simple bench waiting there, the custom footstool. The old hall smelled like socks and mould after a solid week of rain.

A teenaged Toby had yet to shed his baby fat, and much was made of his rolled-up trousers and especially his bare feet, thought to be an affectation. He claimed that his body was a vibratory presence and must connect directly to floorboards to create the acoustic chamber. Reaching the bench, he bowed deeply then sat down, adjusting the vents of his jacket.

A dozen or so musicians huddled in the back of the auditorium, where they glanced at each other with quick smiles, no attempt to hide a burning jealousy; they'd been eliminated from the competition in earlier rounds.

Near to the front, five judges sat with clipboards in hand; this was what they'd been waiting for, one final chance to be dazzled and moved. If this barefoot kid played like he did in the semis, he'd walk off with the prize and an international career would be launched.

Toby favoured a full-throttle assault on each piece, breakneck pace during the fast passages, then wheeling back to pure sky on the languorous adagios.

"The Competition" is an excerpt from a work in progress.

Who were the other three players that night: does anyone remember or care?

His elegant hands wrapped around the instrument while one foot found the stool, the other pressed into the floor. As he raised a cupped hand over the sound hole he let out a long, audible exhalation.

When a person dies, they may sigh deeply at the end. So it went for Toby.

He began to play, head bobbing, eyes squeezed shut—but soon audience members frowned and began to peer at their programs. He certainly was enjoying himself up there, ripping through chord sequences and arpeggios, but something was very wrong.

The judges squinted at their programs too: allegedly the boy was playing Guiliani, a predictable classicist, but this was not what they were hearing. They scribbled notes, squeak of pens racing across paper.

You can say this for Toby: no one stopped listening or watching, any more than you'd take your eyes off a baby tumbling from an open window.

This was Paris, some stage for a meltdown.

JASPER IS BUSY tidying his desk at the Institute, hiding files from his nosy colleagues and renaming computer documents in the event a certain party decided to sneak in after hours and meddle. He likes to be last in the office, the one who turns off lights and printers and copy machines, then lowers the blinds in anticipation of morning sun.

Toby will be getting peckish back home, he decides. He feels Toby's hunger before the boy realizes it himself; they've been together that long. His lover—a term Jasper favours over the sexually neutral “partner”—makes forays to the fridge, tears off lettuce leaves for salad, and stirs a bay leaf into the stewpot.

Or doesn't.

Sometimes, especially in the last few months, Toby doesn't get around to cooking dinner. Jasper is peeved by this thought, for he, after all, is the one who shoulders a complex, full-time job. Just for a moment, Jasper wonders what it would be like if Toby didn't exist, how much simpler his life would become, and how empty. There are days when Jasper craves such emptiness: is this such a terrible thing to admit?

The screen saver floats into view: beads of dew gleaming off iguana hide, so unlike this dry frightened city in spring where the virus has chased citizens into their homes. A client painted the stone, now balancing on top of the monitor, to resemble a ladybug. Jasper sets the creature on top of a pile of sorted papers, its beady eyes facing north.

The Institute's walls are painted sea-green, a hue chosen by the last chairman after she read that green invoked tranquillity. Someone else brought in the wooden desks, reclaimed from a defunct physio centre. That bare patch next to the window used to contain a Frida Kahlo print, a creepy self-portrait with mini-Diego peering out of her forehead. Jasper tore it down; clients crave only that the ordinary will appear ordinary again.

Before he unlocks the door to their downtown row house, Jasper cocks his ear and listens; Toby's been fine for years, but lately he's been more distracted than usual. It is Jasper's mission to make sure the boy never capsizes into dark waters again. As he sets key into the lock he feels the old flurry of excitement, intact after all these years.

PAMELA FROWNS over her bifocals and makes that noise in her throat that drives Toby nuts. Very slim and brittle, she glares at the manuscript page, then at her seatmate who is leaning forward, squinting hard at the music.

Toby taps his baton on the metal stand. "From bar twelve, kids," he instructs. "Pick up after the arpeggio."

The members of Guitar Choir are at least a dozen years older than he, ranging from early forties to late middle age.

"Twelve?" Pamela asks, eyes widening. "Twelve?" she says again, sounding mystified by the request.

Toby wonders if she's deaf as well as being tone-deaf. He sings her part while tapping out the beat; it's nearly four o'clock, not much time left to rehearse. In ten minutes the after-school crowd arrives, snapping basketballs in the upstairs gym. This church is multi-use and his group shares the basement with a Montessori school and the local chapter of AA.

Guitar Choir scrambles through the passage and onto the next, plinking in four-part harmony, three players per line. They sound like balalaikas, Toby thinks.

Finally Bill, retired fireman, cries in delighted recognition, “A Beatles medley!”

Indeed it is: eight songs sewn into a cunning five-minute package, guaranteed crowdpleaser.

“Parkdale Cultural Festival in two weeks,” Toby reminds the group and they yelp with excitement.

Except Pamela who repeats, “Two weeks?” and lifts her glasses, indicating this is news to her.

Toby tugs his jeans over his narrow hips and breathes in deeply, rolling his shoulders. Last night was ball hockey and he’s feeling it in his arms and left shin, where someone nailed him with a stick blade. Then there were the half-dozen post-game beers, and didn’t they end up at The Duke singing shit Broadway tunes?

He runs a hand through his hair, what’s left of it, and tells his group, “Bar twenty,” giving the music stand another whack. “Second guitars enter bar twenty-two,” he adds, giving Pamela a meaningful look.

She actually smiles, that strained face pleased to be recognized.

The choir chugs on, tight with concentration while Toby keeps the beat and cues entrances. Stanley, who never gets the rhythm right, is lagging, still on “Norwegian Wood” while the rest have segued into “Long and Winding Road.” Toby sings his part, coaxing him back into the fold.

“Someone’s way out of step!” Charles, a tax lawyer, protests, and that brings the group to a staggering halt.

“Don’t quit!” Toby pleads and keeps waving the baton, but it’s no good; they sit in silence now, sixteen faces staring at him, waiting for guidance.

Pamela proclaims in a tragic tone, “It’s too hard for us.” She’s been a member since day one and organizes the annual fundraiser.

Her seatmate, Bert, ventures, “Just count each bar.”

This angers Pamela, who is a bookkeeper by trade, and she snaps back, “Quit tapping your foot on the offbeat and messing me up.”

Toby stares at the ceiling, the perforated tiles stained with yellow, relic of a burst pipe. Are those black spots mould?

Charles leans back on his chair, arm cradling his top-of-the-line guitar. “The key changes are confusing here, Toby,” he says.

“You just have to count,” Bert repeats.

“Counting is not the only issue,” Charles insists with laboured patience.

Bert manages a Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet and Charles can't forget this fact. At guitar choir you run into people you'd never run into in real life.

"Well, genius boy?" Pamela says, looking right at Toby. The term has begun to sound sardonic over the years. "We could perform the Albeniz instead," she adds and turns to others for support of this idea.

They squirm in their chairs; everyone is a little scared of Pamela. The Albeniz features her seven-bar solo, which she plays meticulously and without a shred of musical expression.

"Why are we playing Beatles songs?" Tristan pipes up from the back row. He's pastor of some weird church in the east end.

"Because you asked for it," Toby says and begins to knead his lower back with his fist. Jasper promised he'd hire a Korean girl to walk up and down his spine; there's a cure for everything in Jasper's world. "I arranged this medley," Toby continues, "because you begged for songs you know."

Silence greets this comment: they've forgotten. He's been working on the arrangement for months, getting paid zip for the extra effort, imagining their smiles of pleasure and recognition as he created this pastiche of songs from their youth.

"Five-minute break, not a second more," Toby announces.

Pamela scuttles up to him before he can leave the room to take a whizz. "I wonder if we could work on my part during break," she asks. "Bert and I are utterly at sea."

"I'm not," Bert says, stretching his long arms to the ceiling. As always, he's chewing on a monster wad of gum.

The whole group circles around Toby, waiting for a wisp of praise or extra attention. Even Charles sidles up to show off his new tuner, imported from Germany, featuring adjustable pitch calibration.

Pamela stands solidly at Toby's side. "I really do need to work with you, if that's not asking too much."

Toby gestures towards the open door and the dark cement hallway and makes a move as if to flee.

She draws even closer. "Do you think we'll ever get better?" she asks.

The bustle of snack-fetching and guitar-tuning ceases and there is silence in the room as everyone strains to hear Toby's answer.

"It's been eight years already," Pamela reminds him, as if he needed reminding.

"Of course—" Toby begins, then falters.

"Because Guitar Choir is the high point of my week," she adds.

There is a chime of agreement.

"Should we continue another eight years, we may have to rename ourselves the Choir of Ancients," says Charles. He waits for the titter of laughter.

"You'll never leave us, will you?" Bert says plaintively.

Every so often Toby's sense of smell turns aggressive, wave upon wave of odours that he feels compelled to name: pong of Play-Doh, eco-cleanser, plastic sleeping mats, stale pee . . . and something else he can't pin down: it seems to radiate from his own body, acidic and nasty.

"You OK?" It's Denise, the pretty one. She slides a hand over his wrist; he must have dropped his baton. He heard it fall, a tiny clatter of fibre-glass against tile.

"Can I get you a glass of water?" Pamela frets.

"Please," Toby answers. He's parched, his throat raw.

The women start to scurry about as he unzips his leather jacket and loosens his collar. No goddamn air in this basement room; he hasn't felt this claustro in years. Is that his heart ping-ponging inside his chest? Tiny points of light hit his retina; he sits on the table, legs dangling, feeling their worried stares rub like sandpaper.

"Know something, gang," he says, managing a smile, "I'm going to have to call it quits today."

"Of course," Denise agrees and her hand squeezes his shoulder.

"How will you get home?" someone says. They know he doesn't drive.

"Shall I call Jasper?" Charles offers.

"I'll run him home," Denise says, taking charge.

"Let me," Pamela says, popping her guitar in its case. "You have to pick up your kids from the sitter."

Should have eaten a proper lunch, Toby thinks crossly. No more hot-dogs grabbed off a street vendor: sunk by fat and carbs. He feels steam rise off his face. Pamela passes him a glass of water and he takes a long, grateful slug and the room starts to right itself. His jacket, now gathered on his lap, smells like a stable.

"I'm fine," he says and fingers the retrieved baton. "We'll continue."

"Are you sure?" Denise says.

They peer at him, faces pinched with concern.

Sliding back onto his feet he assures them, "Right as rain. A momentary hiccup, due to an ill-advised lunch."

The comment is greeted by relieved laughter and they take their places.

"Pick it up after the repeat," he instructs in what he hopes is a firm voice.

Denise beams with encouragement from the back row.

Didn't he kiss Denise once? They were standing backstage after a successful Harvest concert when she capsized her head onto his shoulder and whispered, "Thank you, Toby, for everything." She smelled great: expensive perfume, nothing from nature.

"I once had a girl . . ." Toby sings, getting them back into it.

THE TWO MEN LIVE at the end of a lane that features half a dozen row houses tucked behind a walk-in clinic. The squat cinderblock building is hideous but buffers traffic noise and makes the lane invisible to passersby.

Jasper hears the clomping of feet inside the flat and frowns; they always remove their shoes before entering—why track city filth inside? The door's unlocked and the mail is still trapped in the slot: clues rain down.

He takes a breath and pushes open the door.

It soon hits him, the rank smell of perspiration. His eyes adjust to the darkness: the lump in the corner is a chair Klaus made them rescue from his house. Klaus is Toby's old man, now resident in Lakeview Terrace. Jasper crouches to unknot his laces and hears the pacing continue after the briefest of pauses. He can deal with any brand of movement; it's a too-quiet room with no response that he dreads.

Wearing only his boxers, Toby tears back and forth across the flat, slamming drywall with his open hand, not so far gone that he doesn't protect his fingers. His sandy hair flaps, his ribcage sucks in and out, and the instant he sees Jasper he gives a sob before catching himself. Then he speeds back into anger, hitting the kitchen wall, the refrigerator door.

Jasper feels a trill of fear. The bookshelves rattle with their neatly filed volumes of European history—Jasper's university major.

“Don’t touch me!” Toby rasps as his lover reaches for his arm.

The rancid smell puckers the air. The kid bathed this morning; Jasper saw to that, but this morning was a different universe. He reaches out as the boy swings past again, clipping his forearm.

“Don’t touch me!” Toby repeats. His small shoulders rise and fall. “And quit looking!”

This is an old demand that Toby returns to; he doesn’t understand that looking is an expression of love. Or perhaps he does know, for he ducks behind the counter and glances back, to see if Jasper’s still watching.

The ruckus will be heard by Miranda and Jill upstairs, who are likely crouching with their ears to the floor.

“Stop this,” Jasper cautions then makes a lunge for the boy who dodges at the last minute.

Toby sinks his hip into the edge of the teak dining table, another Klaus artifact. “You want me to stop moving, to keep nice and tidy in my coffin?”

Drama queen, Jasper thinks. “What happened?” he asks instead.

“I thought you knew everything about me.”

“Not quite everything.”

Toby’s breathing begins to settle. No meat on his bones, Jasper thinks with a familiar pang. Not much to work with should something go awry.

“I can see that you are upset,” Jasper prods, as he would a client.

Toby grabs a glass and fills it with water, which he then pours over his head while leaning over the sink.

When Jasper first set eyes on him he was a fleshy boy who wore his corkscrew hair tugged back in a pony tail. Jasper flexes his own gym-muscled arms; whatever weight falls off the kid seems to end up on his own body. If he could just get close enough to touch him; the boy loses contact with his own skin, gets so he can’t stand being caressed, gets so he can’t stand Jasper.

“Something’s wrong,” Toby says.

“I know, baby.” Jasper edges forward while Toby stays put, arms hanging at his sides. He runs a finger down the boy’s forearm to his open palm, circling those calloused fingertips: a musician’s hands. Toby’s brown eyes gaze at the far wall, at nothing.

Touch never fails; it's what the boy has to be reminded of. He turns to look at Jasper, as if gradually awakening to his own pleasure. Pretty soon Toby's hands are sliding all over him, burrowing under each armpit then jumping between Jasper's legs, and Jasper quickly makes room, he accommodates.

"Turn over," Toby orders and a relieved Jasper obeys.

The carpet that tattoos their knees is a fake kilim, courtesy of Klaus. If the old man could see them now.

They untangle to the sound of a kettle whistling in the apartment above. Jill calls, "All set, angel-face."

There's a long sigh of water pouring into a china teapot. That rhythmic thump is the dog's tail hitting the floor.

Jasper eyes his lover who lies on his back facing the ceiling, mouth tipped open, the anger seeped out of him. Though he's nearly thirty, the skin on his face is smooth as a child's and he shaves no more than twice a week. Jasper rubs his own bristly chin: night and day.

Toby's eyes flicker open. "Don't you get tired of keeping watch?" he says in a sleepy voice, then lifts himself into a sitting position all in one move, no hint of creaky joints. He tosses his head in a theatrical way, a gesture going back to the time when his hair was long. "I'm thinking of going to Montreal," he says, as if the idea just occurred to him.

Astonished, Jasper says, "Why?"

"There's that guitar competition."

"Yes?"

"I might go."

Montreal hosts an international competition where classical guitarists fly in to compete for a grand prize: recording contract, series of recitals, cash.

"Why?" Jasper repeats, feeling himself grow cold.

Toby's gaze shifts sideways, like a crafty child's. "Just to see."

"See what?"

Upstairs, cutlery clangs against china and someone turns on the stereo: Edith Piaf, the little sparrow.

And Toby's wrists are sparrow thin. Where does he get the strength to practise for hours? He starts drumming his kneecaps while his genitals rest on the rug, the only part of him done in.

“See if I still can.”

Age eighteen, Toby played before an adoring crowd, then it fell apart. Music is a fossil, waiting to be scraped clear. His last solo performance was ten years ago. In those early days he played a Karl Honderich instrument, such a jewel, though tragically left on the Paris Metro during that explosive week. The luthier’s dead now and a lot of the old boys are gone for good. Segovia is scratchy vinyl remastered on CD and Bream hardly plays in public any more.

Jasper reaches out to touch Toby’s heated cheek, such a contrast to his own chilled flesh.

“You don’t think it’s a good idea,” Toby says, accusing. He frightens himself before he frightens anyone else.

Jasper speaks carefully. “I didn’t say that.”

“Because I peaked before I hit twenty,” Toby reminds him.

Does he think often of what might have been? Upstairs, the women sing along to “La Vie en Rose” as if they were hearing it in some Left Bank boite: picture a bearded poet in the corner, cranked on absinthe.

“We haven’t had this conversation in years,” Jasper says. “I thought we were out of the woods.”

Toby bristles. “You’re saying I can’t do it.” Then he jumps to his feet in one motion, towering over Jasper.

There is no winning this discussion, not while he’s in such a mood. Jasper’s shoulders throb; it’s where the pain goes after another day dealing with the situation at work. Deliberately switching topic, he says, “Luke deleted everything on the website. Turns out he spent half the night in the office changing passwords.”

Luke is current chair of the board of directors at the Institute; Jasper is the long-time executive director.

Toby says nothing; his face reveals no hint that he has heard a word.

“We can’t get into our files. I spent all day hunting down tech support.”

Toby doesn’t care; this skirmish means nothing to him, for his mind is on higher things. The artist plants his fingers in the air onto an invisible fret board. “I’m getting old,” he muses. Jasper snorts. “You’re twenty-nine.” And I am forty-four, he might add, but doesn’t.

Toby reaches for a towel to mop up; after sex he won’t get dressed until he has to.

“I saw this coming,” Jasper claims, watching his naked lover move toward the window and peer out. Their ground-floor flat backs onto a pocket-size park that hardly anyone knows about. “You’ve been restless since what happened with Klaus,” he says.

Toby freezes and Jasper understands he’s onto something. “I saw how you were that day after cleaning out his house.”

Klaus recently moved himself into Lakeview Terrace: pure insanity; he may be a senior citizen, but hardly a crock. A touch of Parkinson’s plus the diabetes, but fending.

“His carefully contained life scared the hell out of you,” Jasper adds.

“Depressed me,” Toby corrects and reaches to scratch between his legs.

“Entering a music competition proves you aren’t Klaus,” Jasper says.

“You think?”

“Of course you’d be up against some of the best in the world.”

“I am the best in the world.”

He speaks with such a lack of vanity that Jasper is temporarily silenced. It is so tempting to utter the damning word: *were*. You were among the best, Toby, as we all were something else.

He watches the boy scoop up his boxers, grab a T-shirt and a pair of flip-flops, and head toward the front door.

“Where are you going?”

Clip of panic when Toby doesn’t answer. He listens to the jiggle of the latch as the boy escapes.

Performing takes nerves of steel. March onstage as the spotlight sears your eyes and feel the hushed expectation of the audience. Sure there’s a program, but anything can happen. Jasper stares at his own shaking hands. He reaches for his clothes, dresses quickly, then makes for the front hall where he switches off the interior light and presses his face to the window.

The night bleeds into view.

Toby perches on the stoop, head in hands, knees poking out of his shorts. He looks about twelve years old. A medic from the neighbouring clinic slips out of its rear door for a smoke break, her gauze mask pushed down. Where Jasper works, all guests and clients entering the building don masks and latex gloves. Once upstairs, behind the Institute’s doors

and cleared of obvious symptoms, they remove the paraphernalia: risk of infection is still low. Tourists keep a wide berth of the city and who can blame them, the media blaring updates on the hour? The latest Andrew Lloyd Weber musical is threatening to pack up and leave and Wagner's Ring Cycle played to near-empty houses. Each day the papers give the case count and a separate number of suspecteds, followed by the casualty list, still fewer than twenty.

Toby turns sideways and Jasper catches a glimpse of his jaw grinding molars to dental dust. The medic speaks with animated gestures, something about fishing for pike up in the Kawarthas. She sucks hard at her cigarette; there's been a renaissance in smoking since the virus hit town.

Does Toby want one?

Sure he does. He jumps off the stoop while she holds out a package of Camels, her scrubs reeking of high-power disinfectant.

Yesterday Toby said it wouldn't be a bad idea to put all the quarantined people together, maybe in the old TB hospital north of the city. He got all worked up, a man of vision. They would be well fed and given interesting things to do during their convalescence, like pottery and carving canoe paddles—a sort of camp. Doctors could try new antivirals and experimental treatments. Then his head jerked upward: had he really thought this? In that second he'd felt the virus hover, waiting opportunistically for an opening.

I'm nothing like my old man, Toby tells himself, but he can't shake off the idea as he savours the rush of nicotine. Evening air draws fog in off the lake and he shivers on the stoop, skinny bum drawing up the cold. He and the medic smoke in tandem until she confesses "I fall to sleep at night watching cartoons," then disappears into the bright interior of the clinic.

Ann Ireland is the award-winning author of A Certain Mr. Takahashi (upon which the 1991 feature film The Pianist was based), The Instructor (1996), and Exile (2002). She is a past president of PEN Canada.

Sunday Night

Jay Baruch

An imposing four-foot eleven in running shoes and carrot-coloured hair, Mrs. Sheila Goldstein clutched her belly and waddled to the Emergency Department triage desk, where Anna waited, stretching her calves and hamstrings. “I’m dying,” Mrs. Goldstein cried, her voice bruised by forty years of smoking and from bossing her husband Albert, who she claims died during sleep because he was too lazy to wake up.

Anna checked her sports watch. “You’re late this week.”

“The pain’s ten out of ten.” Mrs. Goldstein doubled over. “No, twelve.”

“I can only imagine.”

“You’re too young to imagine this. You wouldn’t know where to begin.”

Anna grinned. “I’ll get Dr. Bullock. He’ll want to know that you’re here.”

But Anna didn’t move. Her focus remained locked on Mrs. Goldstein’s powder-blue dress with white lilies, the snowflake sweater too small to be buttoned, her cherry red lipstick. Mrs. Goldstein’s moaning echoed in the waiting room, which was typically empty whenever the Bills played. Then she made her move, a leisurely swoon, choreographed to allow the athletic Anna to run around the desk and safely catch her.

Anna lowered Mrs. Goldstein into a chair, placed a cool towel upon her forehead, and smiled that smile that belonged to a recent nursing school grad still fascinated by this game they played week after week. She phoned Dr. Bullock in Exam Room Three.

“He’s occupied with a finger laceration, Mrs. Goldstein.”

“I’m dying and he’s busy with a finger boo-boo?”

“Die a little slower,” said Anna, encouragingly. “Dr. Bullock wants to finish with this patient so he could spend more time with you.”

Her pencilled eyebrows crossed like swords. Mrs. Goldstein rocked her hefty, hipless body, shaped not unlike the pot roasts she boiled with potatoes Sundays when Albert was alive. This routine continued, only now she spent the evening in the ED for the constipation and loneliness that accrues from eating leftover pot roast day after day.

THE THUMB LACERATION didn't impress Dr. Bullock. “Let's clean it up and dress it. It'll close fine on it's own,” he told Heather Sands, from Interstate Fashion College, down the road across from Honest Joe's Bargain Plaza. She lowered her gaze, snorted back tears. “A thin scar, what's the big deal?” he said. “It's a cut, not an amputation.”

“I want to be a hand model,” she said, burping up Pina Coladas. “My plans are now totally screwed by a can of cat food.”

Pretending to re-examine the cut, Dr. Bullock studied her long, lithe fingers, the soft, alabaster skin. Regal and elegant, they appeared out of place on a body that just missed being pretty: a tiny but blunt nose, a bright big-toothed smile.

She pulled from her purse a postcard of a sculpture of two hands barely touching. “A friend sent me this from the Rodin Museum,” she said. *I see your perfect hands!* was printed boldly on the back. Dr. Bullock pressed his thumb where the ink ran. The romantic mist of Paris, he thought, trying to resist the memory of him and Natalie strutting along the streets on their honeymoon.

“Perfect no more,” Heather said. Wistfulness dulled her lovely green eyes, a fateful look he knew too well. It exerted itself as his private practice achieved new levels of failure, his aspirations down-shifting to vague and bitter appeals for recovery. Never had he seen defeat in someone so young, when the future was spacious and forgiving. He felt compelled to repair her cut. He questioned his judgment as the first stitch slid through skin. The sutures might leave pinpoint scars that will balloon under a zoom lens.

And now, Mrs. Goldstein's cries tortured him every second he wasn't at her side.

MRS. GOLDSTEIN EXPECTED the laxative magnesium citrate and the narcotic painkiller Dilaudid within fifteen minutes of hitting the door. If not, she reported in the patient satisfaction survey how he was content to let a seventy-two-year-old woman suffer in pain. He had ordered blood tests and CT scans of her abdomen the first few times he evaluated her, but each work-up showed nothing except constipation. He tried explaining how Dilaudid effectively treated pain but didn't address the cause of the pain, how a nasty side effect of narcotics was constipation. Each time she hurt him with the survey. *Dr. Bullock doesn't listen. His hands are cold. His eyes bloodshot. He needs breath mints. He must iron his shirts. Does he own a comb?* Most patients tossed the surveys in the trash. Mrs. Goldstein was a retired school librarian with time to burn. *Never again will I return to the ER.* Every Sunday evening, 8 p.m., there she was.

"I'M OVERDO, I'm overdo. Ohh," Mrs. Goldstein screamed from Exam Room Ten, scorching the dated posters in the back hallway that cautioned against syphilis and hypertension, the great masquerader and the silent killer.

"That woman sounds pretty bad," said Heather. Her acne-inflamed cheeks gave off heat. What decent doctor could ignore such shrieks? he imagined her thinking.

"She's not as sick as she sounds," he said, concentrating on squaring his knots.

"I'll be dead in six minutes, Bullock," Mrs. Goldstein cried.

Dr. Cummings, the ED director, had lectured him about Mrs. Goldstein's evaluations. The hospital administrators were not pleased, either. If she requested narcotics, make the customer happy. Dr. Bullock swallowed but couldn't fully digest this edict. He trained here in family practice twenty years ago, when it was the old Mercy Hospital. Battling creditors and lawyers in the six months since closing his practice, he's dependent on this steady paycheque, grateful to be working 7 p.m. to 7 a.m., four nights a week. The two other hospitals in the area had already shut their doors.

"You're not sewing a thumb," yelled Mrs. Goldstein. "You're avoiding me."

Sweat milked from his greying neck hairs, chilled his spine.

“Go see her,” urged Heather. “It’s OK.”

“Do you really want to be a hand model? It takes time to do this right,” said Dr. Bullock, his hand trembling as he drove another stitch.

He raised his head. Her quivering lip reminded him of his former office manager. He needs to work quicker, see more patients, if the practice is to survive, she said. He wouldn’t hear it. “I will not let other people tell me how to much time to spend with my patients,” he screamed at her, again and again. Regret and sadness covered him like a thick fog since that day. As Mrs. Goldstein yelled and Heather flinched, Dr. Bullock tried to steer his way through this moment with its misfiring parts.

“Talk to me. What does it take to become a top-notch hand model?” he asked.

“I’m only six credits short of my degree in Merchandise Demonstration.”

“Good,” he said, indifferently. “Then what?”

“Off to NYC. A friend’s uncle has a friend at the Shopping Network.”

One suture left. He steadied his hand.

“I’ll be dead in four minutes,” crowed Mrs. Goldstein.

Anna poked her head behind the curtain. Dr. Bullock expected to see frustration, stern-faced rage, but she rolled her eyes affectionately. “Do you need anything?” she asked. Night shifts required an older, battle-tested nurse. Wary, even frightened at first, Dr. Bullock accepted Anna’s inexperience because it came with fresh eyes, a blue-grey clearer than river water, and a soft heart. Her blonde ponytail bounced from one shoulder to the other when she walked. If not old and bankrupt in many ways, if he could afford one more passion, he’d forgive himself the fantasy of falling in fall in love with her.

“BEAUTIFUL JOB, Dr. Bullock,” said Anna, dressing the thumb in gauze.

“The wound closed well,” he reassured Heather. But it could’ve been better. If only Mrs. Goldstein wasn’t knocking inside his head. Fortunately, the body healed itself most of the time, wrote it’s own story. When it’s young, anyway.

“That’s it,” yelled Mrs. Goldstein. “I’ve died. I’m dead.”

“I must go,” Dr. Bullock said to Heather.

Heather nodded. "You're the first person I didn't know who treated me like I have a special talent."

"No problem." He recalled those hands of Rodin. They're two right hands. If part of the same body, their beauty signified severe, unseen aberrancy. "Good luck," he said.

"People in the 'business' get perks galore," piped Heather. Once sutured, she appeared intoxicated by her possibilities. "What do you need?" she asked Dr. Bullock. "Lawn furniture? Pool supplies? A weed whacker?"

He now lived in a two-bedroom apartment with a great view of the 24-Hour U-Shop. He possessed no pool and no lawn, only a deck/fire escape big enough for two folding chairs and a snack table. Each month he wrote an alimony check to Natalie. "I'm not leaving because a top medical student was too idealistic for the real world," she said, ten months before. "But over the last twenty-four years, you've become stubborn and hateful about it."

"I'm still dead," Mrs. Goldstein announced. "It's not fun."

"What would I need?" he asked himself. If he didn't leap to Mrs. Goldstein's side, he'd need a new job, maybe a new career. He might need that weed-whacker after all.

He couldn't enter Mrs. Goldstein's room. Not yet, anyway. He visited the bathroom, emptied his bladder, splashed his face. For an instant, the mirror revealed the face of a fatigued, eager intern at the old Mercy Hospital, coming to the ER in the middle of the night for another admission. Before meeting a new patient, he'd wash in this same exact bathroom, scrub the dead cells off his face, and always find a layer underneath prepared to smile. The bulb above the sink popped, leaving Dr. Bullock alone in the dark, fumbling between past and future for the door with a broken lock.

"YOU'RE EATING?" he said, entering Mrs. Goldstein's room. Her clothes folded upon a chair. She lay on the stretcher, potato chips crumbing the chest of her gown.

She spit between her clenched teeth when he examined her. Her muscles remained soft, however. Her doughy skin didn't resist his deep probing.

"I prescribed stool softeners," said Dr. Bullock. "Did you take them?"

Mrs. Goldstein slapped the air with the back of her hand.

"I need my drink and Dilaudid."

"You need fruit and fibre," said Dr. Bullock, "and stool softeners."

She flattened the empty bag of potato chips, folded it into quarters. He brought over a garbage bin. "The pain is asking too much of me," she said. "Yes?"

Dr. Bullock winced as her *Yes?* jabbed under his ribs, her playful blackmail week after week. He stepped back, rubbed his face. He was a good doctor once, thorough to the point of self-destruction. "Let's try a rectal exam."

"What? You never did this before." She moved uneasily on the stretcher. "I'd prefer Dilaudid."

"This is better. If you're really stuffed up, a little agitation might be in order." He snapped on gloves, then a pair on top of that.

"Is it really necessary?" she said.

Dr. Bullock paused. "We can't have you in here week after week, can we?" He gave himself a moment to reconsider. "It's necessary, now."

He assisted Mrs. Goldstein onto her side. She didn't help as he tugged down her underwear. Rectal exams on women in the ED required a chaperone. He viewed Mrs. Goldstein as a genderless tormentor. Her buttocks were expansive, pale, and veiny. There were bruises, too, paddies of green and yellow swirls. "What's with these bruises?" he asked, cautious about how much concern he wanted to commit to this.

"I slip sometimes," she said, trying not to look back at him. He was hoping for a smooth, uneventful passage for him, something mildly uncomfortable for her. His finger met a hard ball of stool. His face tensed. His search revealed what he didn't want to find. The discovery demanded action he didn't want to do. Serves you right, he thought to himself. He hooked his finger, began scooping. Mrs. Goldstein screamed.

"Does this really hurt?" he said, in a voice he knew wasn't sympathetic enough.

"Not really."

"Why do you sound like I'm murdering you?"

"What you're doing, it's disgusting."

"Do you think I like this?" he said with irritation, trying to speak without breathing in. The smell was acrid and sweet and sharp as a knife.

Hips flexed in a fetal position, she anxiously rested her head against her arm as he worked below. "Where is everyone? The place is a morgue."

"Football. The Bills game went into overtime."

"Nobody gets sick during the Bills game?"

"Only during halftime."

Dr. Bullock believed the excavated nuggets of stool piling on the stretcher absolved him from participating in her nervous chatter. What more could she demand from him? His mind throttled between concentration and distraction, and in the process started second-guessing Heather's thumb. He should've glued the wound. Less time, an equal if not better cosmetic result. Damn it. He kept digging. His finger began to cramp. The body could do such cruel things to itself, he thought. You could trust it only so much.

Anna knocked on the door. "The Bills lost in overtime," she said, panic rising in her voice. "There's a serious line out here."

"It's fine," he reassured Anna. A veteran nurse might complain that the bus just dropped off half the town, but would quickly make sense of the chaos. Anna needed his help, but if he left Mrs. Goldstein now, her screaming would incite a riot.

"How about my shot?" said Mrs. Goldstein.

His index finger was buried to the hilt. He imagined it peeking out her mouth. His long fingers were usually enough for this task, which didn't require skill, only effort.

"This is the treatment," he told her. "This will do the trick." The word *trick* sat in his mouth like red wine gone bad that he swallowed anyway. "No shot," he said. "Write what you want on the survey. You're my patient, not my customer. Go find a businessman who would do what I'm doing."

The back of his neck tingled, alert to the patients waiting for him in exam rooms up and down the hallway. "Ooh," she said. "Ooh, my." Dr. Bullock paused. "What's the matter?" A draft warmed the hairs on the back of his hand, followed by playful, bubbling sounds. "Mrs. Goldstein? What's wrong, Sheila?" Her colon answered, an explosion that caught his arm, splintered his chest. His rage, so pure and acute, was no match for the mound on the stretcher, the source of their shared agony a totem deserving reverence.

Anna creaked open the door. "Folks are becoming really angry."

“Handle it,” Dr. Bullock barked. “Don’t let them control the waiting room.”

Anna’s jaw dropped. Colour left her face. She slammed the door.

“I’m so sorry,” said Mrs. Goldstein, sweaty and tired, relieved and disheartened. Tears filled her eyes. “Put your clothes in a bag. I’ll wash them. I’ll even iron your shirt.”

“Don’t worry about it,” said Dr. Bullock, trying to act professionally. Wearing Mrs. Goldstein’s diarrhea on his chest and arm, he couldn’t decide whether this counted as success or evidence that he’d finally hit bottom. Strangely, the answer didn’t matter. It couldn’t matter. Other patients were waiting for him.

He figured Anna would quit instead of dealing with this fecal tsunami, and he wouldn’t blame her. He showered, changed into scrubs. He returned to find Mrs. Goldstein sitting fully dressed on a chair. The room had been scrubbed. Ammonia clung to the air. This victory burned his eyes. Even his tears were confused.

“The stink was so bad, half the people ran out,” said Anna, flaring a newly minted world-weary smirk. “They were cured.”

“What am I supposed to do?” Mrs. Goldstein asked.

“Fresh fruit and fibre,” said Dr. Bullock. “Stay ahead of the pot roast.”

“Next week, what am I supposed to do if I’m feeling better?”

Author of the short fiction collection Fourteen Stories: Doctors, Patients, and Other Strangers, Jay Baruch practises emergency medicine and serves as director of the Ethics Curriculum, The Alpert Medical School at Brown University. <http://www.jaybaruch.com>.

The Ghost Brush

Katherine Govier

My novel tells the story of the story of Oei, daughter of the iconic Japanese printmaker Hokusai, creator of The Great Wave off Kanagawa and 36 Views of Mt. Fuji, and his daughter Oei. A great painter herself, considered by some to have been more talented than her father, Oei remained unknown until the last few years. She was divorced and worked in her father's studio, and cared for him in his old age. This scene takes place in Edo (Tokyo) in 1849, when Hokusai had already lived to exactly double the life expectancy of forty-five years. Oei is speaking.

Eisen and I took a rickshaw to the Ryogoku Bridge to see the New Year's fireworks. Bundled onlookers filled the long arc of the bridge, which stood on its many thick wooden legs high over the wintry Sumida. The surface of the river was placid and vessels large and small were anchored, waiting for the show. We stood at the high point of the arch; the boat with the fireworks discharger was directly beneath us. At the signal, balls of gold and red flew high over our heads, curved, and began to fall, shedding coloured fire.

Eisen brought his drinking flask to his mouth. "I loved you once," he said. "But you were spoken for."

The river flowed silently in the darkness, a black lacquer base for the flowers of light and fire that plumed above. Who had spoken for me? Hokusai, of course. My father.

From *The Ghost Brush* © 2010 by Katherine Govier. Published by HarperCollins Publishers Ltd. All rights reserved.

“My father says he will not die. But death is approaching. And so we wait and pretend it isn’t.”

“It is the pretence that exhausts you,” said my good friend.

I looked further over the railing into the black. “You’re insane!” my father shouted at me. But he was the crazy one. How could I say this without betrayal?

“He is not himself,” I could say. “The Old Man is not available”—that would be polite. Eisen was my old friend. Yet there would be no confiding. I tried it this way. “The repose of old age, he doesn’t experience. He forgets. He insists. He changes his mind. He tries to run, yet he cannot walk. I obey his every word; I don’t expect him to be wrong. He is mad. So I am mad too.”

More fireworks arched over our heads, bursting with the accompaniment of the roars of the crowd. Below, on the moving water, the boats rocked in their straight lines as people stood to watch.

“He is angry because he is dying. And you are not.”

It began to snow, the flakes spiralling down from a great height, past our faces, falling to the water. I patted my friend’s arm, grateful for his presence.

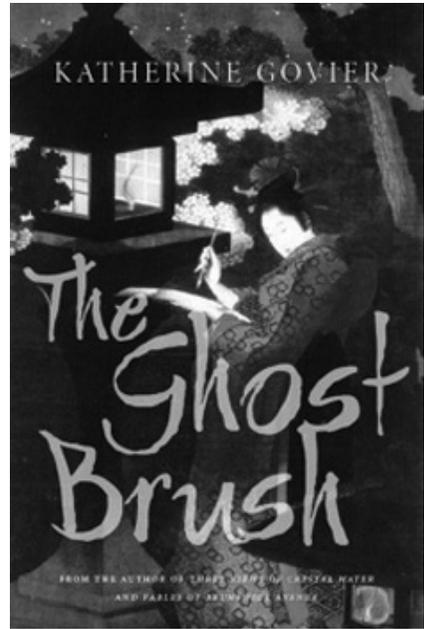
We said goodnight. I would walk and walk as the night gave way to the dawn. At first the snow melted away into blackness when it hit the road. But it kept falling. When I reached the temple at Asakusa, snow was catching on the branches of the pines and there was glittering ice underfoot.

BUT IT WAS NOT MY FATHER who died first. It was Eisen.

So he too was gone, my great friend.

The year did not improve.

My father became more frail, and more insistent. He lay all day on the



thin mattress we had unrolled on the tatami mats and now never rolled up.

One day was worse than the previous.

I called the boy to get the doctor. Shino had given me money, which I had hidden from Hokusai, so he would not spend it on sweets or throw it at a vendor who came to collect. The doctor came.

“There is nothing to be done,” he said. “It is old age. It cannot be escaped.”

Later Hokusai woke up. He began to beg. He could do so much, if the gods would only give him ten more years. He could become a great artist. He begged for ten, then eight, then, wheedling, even one. One more year, and he would become great.

It broke my heart to hear. He got everything he ever wanted, from me. But the gods were not at his beck and call. Immortality was not to be granted, not in this case.

I sat beside him and listened to him bargaining with the gods. His eyes were closed. His face was lined and eager, fully engaged in the negotiations.

“If I can’t go on as Hokusai, I agree to become an elephant—or a blind man—a turtle—or a fox.”

“A fox is good.” I said this to humour him, but he was angry. He turned on me.

“I have won.” He laughed. “Hereafter my failures will all belong to you, Oei. And your success will belong to me.”

What could he mean? But I knew. That his bad works would be considered to have been from my brush, and my best would be assumed to be his. And it was probably true. I dared a sardonic laugh while I admitted as much. That set him off.

“In my next life there is one thing I will not be. A father. This link of me to you will not survive death. This tie will die. I will be free of you!”

He wounded me.

“Die then,” I said. “I shall have no father. You die, and thereby unfather me.”

“I shall. Then I will have no daughter! I will un-daughter myself.”

We were silent for a few minutes. Then he thought better of this plan and tried to win me back.

“But what am I without Oei, my daughter? She brings my tea. She knows my stories. She is the walking book of me. Every picture I draw is carved not in wood but in her mind. She came from me . . .” But he couldn’t stay on this positive line. “From all the wasteful seed. The sons and daughters. Of all of them, why this one?” he raged. “This aberration, this woman-not-woman.”

I hid my face so he could not see my grief. He spoke to his god.

“Of all my deeds, the one to engender *her* outlives me,” he raged.

Eisen’s words helped me. My father was angry, angry that I would live, to paint, while he would not.

But then, he wept and spoke to the gods. “I ask forgiveness. I regret what I have done. My greatness took away that of my daughter.”

What he said was true. In not letting me sign my name he wrote me out of history, which he liked to keep for himself.

He went silent and I thought he was asleep. But not.

“Oei,” he said, “you have time. When you are un-fathered, break loose, and go on your own path.”

Around and around it went.

“What was my path?” I said. “How would I know it?”

I had sworn to Eisen. “He will take me to the grave with him. He makes me old before my time.” Is the grave my path? I swore it wouldn’t be.

“Do it. Go ahead. Die, and un-daughter me, then.” I whispered that. But what would I be? What would the world be, then, without my father?

The disciples came to watch over him, dry-eyed. They bowed, and waited and watched the breath rise and fall in his chest. Then one by one they left. I saw the ones whose veiled eyes confirmed that they disliked his greatest disciple and his closest relative being one and the same, not to mention being a woman.

“Chin-Chin! Come to me. Write it down!”



Oei and Hokusai at work in their “temporary lodgings.” Diorama, Edo Tokyo Museum, Tokyo, Japan.

He had composed his *jisei*, his farewell verse.

*Though doubtless only as a ghost
Yet evenings sprightly will I tread
The Summer Moor*

In Obuse he had worked on this simple verse too. There, it had another line to it, which now he forgot. It was:

And frequent visits to Japan of foreign ships.

A strange line, and one that ruined the poem but I knew why it was there. This dreamt-of future was the release he waited for. Now he knew he would not survive long enough to see it.

I slept and in my mind's eye Eisen came. His whorish old face with eyes puffed from drink gazed on me like an old nurse. "I loved you," he said again. "At least I think I did. But you were spoken for."

"Love!" I said. "I would like to take up again this subject of love. I think it is nothing but a rat's fart in a windstorm. And you can quote me on that."

I ASKED THE BOY NEXT DOOR to bring tea. When it came, Hokusai was someplace else in his mind.

"Die then, old man, and un-daughter me," I told him calmly, companionably while he lay and seemed not to hear.

In an hour, I thought better of that. Un-daughtered, what was I then? What is the world, then, without my father swaggering ahead along the road?

"Old man, you went ahead of the crowd. They didn't forgive you that. Not the censors, not the shoguns, and especially not your fellow artists. By the time they caught up, you had moved on."

He smiled at that.

And me—I came along forty years after, myself. And these trappings of the world became my story. Trappings! Who called them that? An excellent word. I was trapped! The daughter in the service of her father. His dominance, his sensuality had overrun the boundaries. The faint echo now of his animal presence, and the three of us, daughters in the studio. Father.

The judgmental thing I feared in him, I saw in myself. He exacted perfection from himself and others. He did not accept that perfection

was out of reach. He hurt people. Shino. My mother. He hated any deviation from his precious path—he showed no respect for others. I sat beside him with my head cocked off to one side as if listening to a voice from elsewhere. He neglected me, fought me, but could not discard me. I was all he had.

I loved him.

IT WAS DAY. I heard the voice of the fish vendor. “Eel to sell! Fresh from the market. Swimming in the marsh one hour ago!”

All night I had watched him grow more beautiful. The face so thin that the skin clung to his skull, translucent like hot wax around a lit candle. The thinking part of him was moving out, vacating its space, ceasing to know. I took his hand. He begged forgiveness for his failings, and then he asked me to carry on making pictures.

He had spoken of wanting every line to be true. He had begged for just ten more years. Years in which he would continue striving to paint the truth.

But I knew the truth he sought was nothing. It was a phantom. Phantoms appear in different guises to us all.

I told him he would be reborn as a tiger, a tiger in the snow.

I held his right hand. It was unchanged: large, square, wrinkled, firm, so infinitely, invisibly capable that I was in awe. As I had been since my infancy. Could all that art die in an instant? Surely not. It would take long, so long, for every inch and every cord to let go its canny powers. I was calm; he was calm. We had not had many such moments. This is the tragedy of death. It was bringing the peace we had ruined with our restless lives.

He squeezed my hand, my finer hand, and gave one more tremendous “Hah!” Then his went still and he went out. Like that.

I kept the hand in mine. I grew tired, and I lay beside him.

And now it was day. People began to arrive. Although I had told



Tiger in Snow, Hokusai, 1849. This image is thought to be a self portrait in the year of his death, possibly by Oei.

nobody, they knew; “He’s gone,” they said, peeking in. They had felt his spirit travel on. Bounding, they said, across the fields.

IT WAS THE EIGHTEENTH DAY OF FOURTH MONTH—10 May 1849 in the Western calendar. The plum had been and gone, and the cherry blossoms too. It was a beautiful day to be dead.

—I am writing to tell you that my father went to his rest, today, in the morning. He was peaceful and willing to go. (Lie.) He is in our lodging as we prepare for the funeral procession tomorrow. I hope you can be with us.

THE VISITORS LEFT THEIR COINS folded in a beautifully painted paper. I sent the boy to buy a plain box for his ashes. Neighbour women came from the tenements. They sat beside me, sewing his death clothes of bleached cotton. I laughed with them at my clumsiness. She-who-paints-but-does-not-sew was sewing. I washed his body myself. We dressed him, and the apprentices put him in the coffin. Katsushika Isai was there and Kosho. They jostled for position around his corpse.

I enclosed brushes, ink pots, and rolls of paper. I took the powder of my deepest pigments and tucked it in small cups. These cups I wrapped in fine paper. I wrapped all of this in a cloth and tied it at the top.

The priest came from the temple and chanted pillow sutras by his side.

THAT NIGHT people kept arriving. They brought soba noodles in broth, his favourite dish. It was important to be merry, and I was. I heard my voice, echoing in the silence where his had been.

When they left, and before the dawn, I began to paint. I wanted to paint a beautiful lantern for the procession, and that is what I did. As my brush moved of its own accord, I mourned. There had been no luxury, no ease in our life, and none in his death. I had not objected to this, as my mother had done. To have done so would have been to break faith with my father. But now, for this day, I wished for one formal kimono to wear, just once in my life.

In the morning a temple messenger came with a large box: a kimono and all the attendant belts and ties. “The nun left it with us for you. It

belonged to her when she was a married woman.” It was a beautiful lavender with purple iris and green sprays of iris leaf.

The women dressed me, tying the wide obi in place. Outside the procession formed. I had made many models of funeral processions with the *keshi ningyo* dolls. I knew the order by heart: first lanterns, then paper flowers and fresh flowers, and finally caged birds, which would be released later, to bring merit to him. Then came the incense burners and the memorial tablet covered with thin silk and finally the coffin.

“This shabby quarter has never seen so fine a funeral,” said the *unagi* seller.

We fell in line. The disciples one by one—Katsushika Isai, Tsuyuki Koshi, Hokuba, Sori III, Suzuki Hokusai II—the owner of the teahouse Kameya—and Taito II—who had travelled from Osaka when he knew my father was failing. Takai Kozan sent his representatives. And simpler folk: those in the quarter from whom we bought the skewered fish and the charcoal for the *kotatsu*, and the sandal maker. Tosaki-san, who made the famous sweet *Ishihara okhoshi* that Hokusai loved, was weeping. My friend Yasayuke the storyteller. Samurai and priests and scholars, and yes, court ladies. Even the *bakufu* was present.

There were the publishers and artist friends in their suspicious droves, eyeing one another. They had buried Hokusai ten years ago. But now, finally, he was stilled. Death had caught him. It had caught his friends first, his wives, and most of his children too. Only I was left.

But no, there was family: my brother Sakejiro and his daughter Tachi; even the dreadful Monster Boy, crying crocodile tears.

We were 100 in all when we walked the short distance through the tenements on the Temple grounds to the old quarter of Umamichi, one mile away. Only male relatives were permitted to carry objects, but I insisted. I carried the lantern I had painted. At the temple we set our items on an altar. We offered incense, and the priest chanted. We handed out sweet bean jelly in the shape of lotus flowers and leaves; that was our obligation. Certain people who were not members of the funeral party pushed in amongst the crowd and got sweets, which they took away outside to sell.

I had to smile. The storyteller would store that scene away for his later use.

After the funeral we carried the coffin to the cremation spot outside the city. I walked behind, carrying the certificate from the temple, a permit to burn. We arrived: the coffin was put in the oven and the door was sealed and my paper stamped. We waited until dark. Firewood made a weak fire and cremation a bad smell, so it was always done at night.

Into the fire he went.

I gasped. It seemed too soon. The flames leapt on his small offering. I hated it. It was his very life, not even one day ago. Who could be sure he had truly departed? Never, ever would I allow my own bones burnt.

Whatever lived inside those ferocious bones snaked up to stars leaving a dragon's tail of white smoke.

Katherine Govier has published eight novels and three collections of short stories. Her last novel was Three Views of Crystal Water. Her previous novel, Creation, was a New York Times Notable Book of 2003.

Moonlight

Naoko Awa

Translated by Toshiya Kamei

The girl had been sick for a long time. She spent all her time waking and sleeping in her small private room on the third floor of the hospital.

The white room was filled with beautiful things—flowers, origami cranes, dolls, music boxes, and many get-well cards. But the girl was already tired of them.

“I want something different for a change. Like a friend and freedom. I wish I were free for just an hour. I wish someone would send me a ticket out of the hospital.”

One day the nurse came into her room holding a large package. “This is for you,” she said.

The package had the hospital’s address and the girl’s name on it. But instead of the sender’s name and address, it said only “Moonlight.” When the girl tore open the package, threads of various colours spilled out. She also found a spool-like device and a silver knitting needle.

“It’s a lily-yarn kit,” the girl cried. She remembered this old-fashioned children’s pastime.

Five pegs were nailed around the spool-shaped instrument. If you looped a thread around each peg and pulled it with the silver needle, soon it would be knitted into a string. Depending on the patience of the knitter and the amount of thread, the string could be made infinitely long. As a little girl, she learned it from her grandmother. It was nothing more than a childish pastime—you could make only strings. As she grew

older, she began to enjoy knitting in the normal way, and she threw away the lily-yarn kit. She never expected to see one again.

The lily-yarn threads were glossy and smooth. From red to white, from white to yellow . . . their colours blurred as they kept changing. The threads were looped around the five pegs, passing through the hole in the spool and turning into a rainbow-coloured string. Remembering how much fun she had as a child, the girl began to knit.

In less than ten minutes, however, the nurse came into the room. "Oh, you can't do such delicate work," she said. When the girl made a sad face, the nurse said, "All right, you may do it only half an hour a day."

Only half an hour a day! the girl thought. How many centimetres can I expect to knit in such a short time? She put on a smile and put away the kit, determined to knit in secret.

But there was a constant flow of people in and out of the room during the day. At ten-thirty, the doctor made his rounds. The nurse came in frequently. At eleven-thirty, it was lunchtime. When the girl's tray was taken away, her mother came to see her, followed by other visitors. After an early dinner, her father stopped by, then the nurse again. The girl wasn't able to take out the lily-yarn kit until nine in the evening, when the lights were turned off, and she said good night to everyone.

"Ah, I've had to wait until now," the girl mumbled. But she was excited, thinking that no one would bother her again until the next day.

The girl quietly took out the lily-yarn kit she had hidden. She noticed it was light outside.

She saw a white light through the closed curtain, as if there were a forest of white flowers on the other side.

The girl slipped out of the bed, ran to the window, and drew the curtain open. As she looked outside, she saw a large moon floating in the night sky. Under the moonlight, the town looked covered with silver, just as if it had sunk to the bottom of a lake.

I'll knit by moonlight, the girl thought. She opened the curtain all the way to let the moonbeam come into the room. Then she went back to the bed and began to knit.

She repeatedly looped a thread around the pegs and pulled it with the silver needle. Her hands were clumsy at first, but she gradually became faster. The lily-yarn thread changed its colour from red to pink, from pink

to purple, and turned into a sturdy string, becoming longer and longer.

“Wonderful, wonderful,” the girl said, delighted. Should I make it a bit longer and tie my hair up? Or should I make it twice as long and turn it into a belt? If I wear the rainbow-coloured belt around my waist, maybe I’ll get well enough to run and dance, she thought, enjoying her knitting.

She knitted all night without sleep. The longer the string got, the thinner the girl got, and the less she talked.

A few months passed. The lily-yarn string was now long enough to reach the floor. But the girl didn’t stop knitting.

Before long, she began to hear a strange voice calling from outside the window: “Hurry, hurry. Come out.” It sounded like a woman’s voice, a boy’s voice, or the rustle of the wind.

“Wait, I’m almost done,” the girl answered, absorbed in knitting. “When I finish this string, then I can go somewhere, meet someone.” Such thoughts urged her to keep knitting.

Soon the string was five metres long. That was when the threads just ran out, as if the length of the string had been predetermined.

“It’s done, it’s done,” said the girl. She grabbed the end of the string and jumped off the bed. Then she ran to the window and flung the curtain open.

Down below, the silvery town lay bathed in moonlight. She leaned over the windowsill to look down. She saw a young man, pale and beautiful, looking as if he had just descended from the moon.

“Moonlight!” the girl called out to him. The young man looked up and waved to her. “It’s finally finished,” said the girl. The young man nodded, smiling.

“Wait for me, I’ll be there soon,” said the girl. She tossed the long lily-yarn string outside and tied one end of it to the window frame. As she climbed onto the windowsill, her body became as light as a flower petal.

The girl climbed down the string. When she reached the ground, she and the young man held hands. Then the pair dashed through the streets. Their figures, seen from behind, were almost transparent.

They kept running and running. By the time the moon had set, they had disappeared.

Naoko Awa (1943–1993) was an award-winning writer of modern fairy tales. English translations of her stories have appeared or are forthcoming in Crow Toes Quarterly, Fairy Tale Review, Kyoto Journal, Marginalia, Metamorphoses, and elsewhere.

The Nose

Patricia Rockman

Abruptly snatched from sleep, I felt my stomach tight, jaw clenched. My ears opened to the barking dog and screeching gulls flapping outside the house. The red numbers on the clock cheerfully announced that it was 6:32 a.m. Looking out the window, I saw him. Again. That beefy man was throwing bread, mouldy and long past its best-before date, to those nasty birds. They pecked at his offerings, spread out like so many scraps of white flesh, torn apart. He was tossing the spongy pieces onto the small green patch where my children played ball tag and picnicked at twilight, all the summer long. Some of the birds sat, sentinels on the telephone wire, strung out along the street, like vultures anticipating their Communion.

I hate seagulls more than any other bird. In fact, I hate all birds, with their excitable wings and furtive movements. Insatiable, greedy, hungry things. Birds are never still, always hopping, swooping, flying, anxious, unless they are watching over their young. They pass overhead, leaving disgusting egg white droppings with mushy black centres that get all hard and impossible to scrape off surfaces like my car or the walkway in front of the house. It nauseates me to think about it. I get a knot in my diaphragm every time I see birds. My five-year-old daughter happily chases them away when we go wandering in the park. My friends say I have a bird phobia and that I should go see a doctor so I can get over it. What's to get over? I just hate birds. Anyway, I don't want to get over it. I don't want to like birds.

It was only seven a.m. and I was already worked up. I couldn't fall back into sleep because the dog and the seagulls wouldn't stop. It was the

fourth time in a week I had awakened to their racket. I leaped from the bed, furious, grabbed my peach robe to cover my morning cold body and ran outside to tell the man how I felt about his charity. Restrained I said, "Excuse me, but would you mind feeding those birds somewhere else?" He turned his gaze on me and I realized that one eye was wandering, vigilant, expectant. It was watching out for its companion that looked at me sadly, in judgment. I must have looked pretty weird standing there in an oversized bathrobe, no shoes, my hair sticking straight up. He said, "We're all God's creatures, every one. If I don't feed them, who will?" I was thinking, "Those birds don't belong to God. They're Hitchcock's children and should be returned to him." But I didn't say it and suddenly I knew who he was. He was the Dog Man. I had never been quite this close to him before. His heavy frame was sitting on a rusty old brown bike, with a plastic basket full of bread on the back. His white and brown pit bull stood nearby, attentive, guarding. His German shepherd was off digging in the garbage.

I remembered that one day I had been madly chasing a bus and a crowd of people standing on the sidewalk had blocked my path. They were all gaping at something on the ground. In the middle of the group was the Dog Man, a pit bull, and a small, whimpering Portuguese man curled up on the ground, holding his nose with one hand. Except he didn't have a nose. He had a blood hole where his nose should have been, with bone sticking out and pink tissue oozing around the edges. With his other hand he was hunting for his nose but he couldn't see very well. His eyes were full of blood. The Portuguese man looked like a baby as he lay there mumbling Portuguese things I didn't understand. His nose and part of his upper lip were in the pit bull's mouth. The Dog Man was gently trying to coax the nose out of his pet. After a few endless minutes, the pit bull proudly placed the nose in his owner's palm, a gift. The Dog Man turned white and dropped it on the ground with a shriek of revulsion.

A young square-jawed man was saying, "I'm a doctor. I'm a doctor. Will someone get some ice?" Nobody moved. They just stared at the nose and the bit of lip that was lying forlornly in the dirt. Irritated, the doctor ran into a store and returned with a small ice-filled plastic bag. He carefully picked up the nose so as not to damage it further and put it safely

into the bag. The doctor asked, "Will someone please call an ambulance?" Nobody moved.

I don't know. It's not so often that you see a nose without a face. It was beak shaped, with nostrils flaring as if it were disgusted by its predicament. The nose was pale and bruised and had pieces of skin and bone hanging from it. Strings of green snot tinged with blood were coming out of the nostrils.

The doctor finally ran back into the store and made the call himself. When the ambulance came, the doctor asked if anyone would go with the Portuguese man. Nobody moved. I reluctantly said I would go. It seemed like the right thing to do. The Portuguese man cried all the way to the hospital and I held his hand. I tried to murmur comforting words in English and Spanish. He didn't understand me, and anyway I don't think he cared. I thought all Portuguese people understood Spanish. They're both Romantic languages. I don't think the Portuguese man was feeling very romantic. He had bigger concerns. In Portuguese I can only say, "No falla Portuguesa," which means, "I don't speak Portuguese." That wasn't very comforting. Nothing I could say was going to give him back his nose. I tried not to look at him, but it was difficult not to. I wondered if he had a wife and if it would be difficult for her to look at him or kiss his ravaged face.

He had cuts on his upper eyelids and bite marks on his cheeks. His lower eyelids were hanging down, with nothing to support them. I could see right into his throat from where his nose used to be. Only pieces of the nose bones remained and the dog had in fact torn the man's lip right off. It was bleeding quite a lot until the paramedic decided to stuff the hole with gauze to stop it.

When we got to the hospital, the emergency doctor, holding the nose on ice, asked me what had happened, so I told him what I had seen. He told me the nose should have been protected from direct contact with the ice. So now, we had not only a detached nose but also a frostbitten one. It was looking a little blue and grey. They didn't think that they were going to be able to put it back on the Portuguese man, who was now weeping piteously. A nurse came into the cubicle and gave him a shot of something to calm him down. It must really hurt to lose your nose. The Portuguese man started to nod off, so I decided to leave. I wasn't a

relative. I sent him Birds of Paradise while he was in the hospital. I loved their long stalks topped by flaming orange beaks.

I pulled myself back from these memories with the uneasy realization that the Dog Man was giving me a sermon. He had been Born Again and told me that Jesus watched over him and all of his creatures. I was feeling panicky with all the birds flying around and asked him if he would mind just feeding the gulls on the other side of the park. He said he would see if the birds liked it over there. I wanted to ask him if he ever thought of the Portuguese man. I looked at the pit bull and felt a bit sick. It didn't look like the same one. I wondered if Jesus was really watching over the Dog Man and what the Portuguese man was doing for a nose.

Patricia Rockman is a physician, educator, and writer with a focused practice in mental health. She is an assistant professor at the University of Toronto, Department of Family Medicine, cross-appointed to Psychiatry.

Josef: A Memoir

Anthony Jeffery

The late afternoon sun blurs the golden edges of our dog's fur as we watch Catherine descend to the water. I'm sitting above her on our deck drinking pastis and enjoying the dazzle of sun and reflected light from the lake. The grass is so green, so preternaturally green, and the air is warm and still, and the sounds of Catherine swimming mixes with birdsong and the distant, searing buzz of cicadas. Our son, Brendan, has mowed the lawn in long, even strips of raw green, has carefully mowed around the metal sculpture by Josef. Josef, who is dying.

Josef has pancreatic cancer. He doesn't know he's dying, but he suspects. The specialist hasn't met with him to discuss treatment, prognosis. As his family doctor and his friend, I talked to the specialist, a kind, soft-spoken man. I felt I should deliver the bad news; there is no treatment.

Josef has invited us for supper so we can talk about it. We take along a bottle of wine and the salad Catherine made. The pastis helps give me courage, but there is a sadness in the space between us as we drive up to see him. Catherine and I hold hands but there is little to say. Medical explanations sound hollow, even preposterous.

Josef is a prolific artist. Pottery, ceramic, and metal sculpture. A prodigious talent. We met five years ago and were immediately drawn to each other. He was open—that was the thing about Josef—there was no pretence. He hated pretension and so was happy to meet an artist like Catherine, and a doctor who likes a drink and won't say no to an occasional cigar.

Josef lives on a lake in the woods with Sheila, a thin, shrivelled woman whose sagging skin is brown like Moroccan leather. She had

been a dancer and was perpetually stoned. The first time Catherine and I went to visit them, we sat and drank wine for hours, laughing and basking in the heat of Josef's fire, while Sheila sat aloof like a coy child. She loved to cook large vegetarian meals and then not eat anything. She just drank the wine and picked. She'd been very promiscuous, she told us.

Josef's name was actually Hans. He'd come to Canada from Amsterdam in the seventies and favoured highly coloured clothes, so Sheila named him Josef. When I first told him I was a doctor, he grinned and said he wished he had a licence to ask women to take off their clothes and show him their pussy.

Sheila met him when he was in jail. Josef wasn't violent (although he carried himself in such a way, with such tension, like a spring), he was in jail because he was selling hashish, something Canadian authorities did not look kindly on. He saved himself by joining a program to learn ceramics as a job. He discovered his talent there, in jail, and Sheila discovered him.

She sponsored him and, as a model prisoner (it was the early eighties), he was allowed weekends out to pursue his artistic craft. When he was paroled, he moved into Sheila's apartment in Cabbagetown. Or near Cabbagetown. It was really an adjacent, run-down area of cheap rooming houses, alleys with discarded needles and used condoms. Sheila had lived there, alone, smoking pot, since her divorce. She'd abandoned her husband and two children. She had no choice, she explained.

Josef found a ceramic studio where he could work, and he and Sheila had an art show together at a tiny gallery. Sheila had started painting—boldly coloured abstract paintings that grabbed one's attention. The show sold well, and people, especially women, but also men, were drawn to Josef. He thought nothing of it, but in time was persuaded by art dealers and people who wanted to buy his work that he was talented, that he could be an artist. A gallery owner even wanted to represent him. He looked like a mobster, his teeth like a gang of thugs.

They moved into a larger apartment, which was owned by a patron of Josef's and where they could live rent-free. They almost burned it down one night during a large party where people were free-basing and getting crazy. He laughed about it when he told us the story, but there was a grimace to it as well.

Those were the fat years, the mid to late eighties before the crash in the art market in 1991. After that they moved around, lived in the south of France, in Spain. Usually because they were given a place to stay free. They had no money, and when they moved back to Canada it was because their patron had a beautiful house on a lake she was willing to share with them.

Josef scandalized the neighbours by swimming naked from his dock to theirs to introduce himself. But he soon charmed them, as he did almost everyone. There were many wealthy people who had cottages on the lake, and they soon came to hear about Josef and Sheila. They both set up studios in the house, and they used the open-concept living area as a gallery to show their work.

As we turn off the cottage road onto the winding dirt lane, the sun is setting, and an orange glow lights the paper birch. We park the car and let ourselves in. At the bottom of the stairs we are immediately surrounded by Josef's creations—pottery, a whimsical sculpture that doubles as a key hanger—and Sheila's paintings. It is, as always, like entering a magical world of the imagination. A world without kitsch.

"We're here!" Catherine calls.

"Dr. T. and his beautiful bride," Josef says as he descends to greet us. He looks thinner, but I know he has been going to a naturopath and is on a strict diet.

He kisses Catherine, both cheeks twice, then grabs my hand. We wrap thumbs, like brothers. He beams his patented smile and my heart sinks.

Sheila is upstairs in the kitchen. Catherine brings her the salad and I hand Josef the bottle of wine. Sheila is stoned but is being upbeat. She puts the salad in the fridge, offers me a beer.

"I'm not drinking at all," Josef says, holding his stomach. "It just makes me feel sick. Which is sad. I don't think it mixes with my pills."

He shows me the drawer full of pill bottles. Some are prescriptions for narcotic painkillers I have given him, but most are supplements and homeopathic remedies. He hasn't consented to chemotherapy yet, and I doubt he will.

"I'm still drinking," Sheila announces. She pours herself and Catherine a glass of white wine. She can't drink red, Sheila says—it gives her a headache.

Josef pours the bottle of Grolsch into a glass and hands it to me, reserving a small amount in the bottle for himself. We go out and sit on the porch overlooking their bay. The sky is clear and twilight, and bats have started their soundless flights in the crepuscular air. Someone down the bay is having a party, the voices and laughter carrying haltingly through the trees.

Sheila lights a candle, and we talk about what the naturopath told Josef, about his acid–base balance being deranged and the need to eat more of this or that. He has to drink his own urine, he says with a disgusted shudder.

My doctor-self is outraged. “That’s bullshit,” I say.

“No-o-o,” Sheila says, looking at me with the eyes of a true-believer. “It’s already helped him. I’ve noticed how much more energy he has.”

I shake my head and leave it alone. I know the naturopath he is seeing, and I’m ashamed of her, ashamed that she would do this to Josef. But I’m ashamed of myself too, that I have let him get this terrible disease, that I have nothing to offer him but a death sentence.

Not that he’s asking for a miracle. He just doesn’t want to die, isn’t ready to give in. I feel I have to keep hope alive, but one has to be realistic as well. I will not lie to him, I’ve decided. I will tell him the truth if he wants to hear it.

The mosquitoes chase us inside, so we sit up to the table. Normally, we would go to his studio and see what he’s been working on, but he hasn’t been working lately. It bothers his stomach to sit at the pottery wheel, and the painkillers make him feel too tired and stoned.

Josef gives me the wine to open. He goes to the drawer and brings an array of pills to the table, which he takes with a glass of carrot juice. I watch him for signs of discomfort, remembering the stony-hard mass I’d felt in his upper belly the last time he was in the office. He is one of the most vital human beings I’ve ever met—a furnace of energy, a dynamo—but now he looks so frail that tears threaten to spill from my eyes.

“No drinking piss at the table,” Catherine says, trying to keep it light.

“You don’t want some?” Josef stands and reaches for the fly of his jeans. “I could give you some right now.”

We eat the couscous and the wheat-berry salad and talk about this and that. Josef’s son is coming over from Amsterdam to see him. They

are thinking of going to Vancouver to visit friends. Josef drinks juice and eats very little.

Finally, he asks what I have found out about his tests. I had started to think he wouldn't ask and I would be spared this task, had started to fantasize that if it was never spoken, it would not be true. Words have an occult power; once released they are like unpredictable genies.

I clasp my hands together on the table, doctor-like. The cancer is inoperable, I tell him, so there is no hope for a cure. The only treatment would be chemotherapy or radiation, and that would be strictly palliative.

Josef dislikes this kind of medical talk so I translate for him; the disease cannot be stopped and will eventually kill him.

"How much time do I have?"

It is, of course, an impossible and unfair question. But, unfortunately, pancreatic cancer is very predictable; everyone dies, and those with Josef's stage of disease live an average of six months.

"It's impossible to say for sure. But probably six months to a year."

Then something astonishing happens; Josef laughs, and his laughter is like a gift. He laughs at the sheer preposterousness of what I'm saying, and suddenly we're all laughing. We're sitting at the table laughing at death and it is a truly beautiful moment.

"Six months to a year," he says. "Isn't that fucking great?"

He looks at me. "Wow," he says. "Do you have any other good news for me?"

I wish I'd lied to him. And I can see Sheila is upset with me, that she would have preferred I lied, that she is not ready to accept that mean a timeline.

But, the genie is out of the bottle.

I tell him about chemotherapy, but he is not receptive. I probably wouldn't go for it either, I say. It'll just make you sick and won't likely prolong your life.

"I'm sixty-two. I've had a good life," he says, trying to be philosophical.

We leave shortly after this. I apologize for the harshness of my sentence, and Josef apologizes for being upset. "It's better to know," he says. But I wonder—is it?

I call him the next day to see how he's doing. He complains of pain, and I suggest he come into the office for more prescriptions. He and

Sheila show up, as is their habit, without an appointment the next day. I make time for him, am glad to see him out of the house and looking better.

“I’m going to beat this thing,” he tells me.

They’re going to see an expert in Chinese medicine in Vancouver. Josef has great hopes for this. He is naturally suspicious of Western medicine and sees my doctor’s impotence as predictable. I put him on steroids. I know their effect will be limited but at least he will feel better and be able to eat again for awhile.

When he returns two weeks later, it is as I predicted; he has put on weight and has less pain. He even has a little steroid-induced hypomania, and starts making pottery again. He and Sheila credit the Chinese herbs he is taking. I say nothing. I am just happy he is feeling and looking better.

Within a month the effect of the steroids has worn off and Josef calls me again. What did I think about chemotherapy? Could it cure him?

It’s as if we had never had the original, painful conversation about his prognosis. Is he confused? Has the cancer spread to his brain? Or is he just indulging in some wilful forgetting? Denial is, after all, a powerful defence mechanism.

I tell him I don’t think it will cure him, but it may prolong his life.

He says OK, he’ll go for it.

I contact the oncologist and they give Josef an appointment. He and Sheila go, and they admit him to hospital for a few days, put in a central line, and give him the initial dose of chemo. They discharge him home with plans to return in two weeks, but his pain is suddenly much worse.

I get him in to meet me at Emerge. His skin and eyes are yellow, indicating he has a blocked bile duct. He sits there on his stretcher looking lost and frightened. He has suddenly become a patient and is no longer part of that lucky group of people on the outside: the cancer-free, the pain-free. It is reminiscent of prison, he tells me. The old fear.

The specialist agrees to do a procedure, to put in a stent to bypass the blockage. They keep Josef overnight and the next day, after the stent is placed, discharge him home at his insistence. His jaundice slowly improves, but there is pain and a fever. I put him on antibiotics, order blood work, up his pain medication. I talk to his oncologist, trying to

keep the emotion out of my voice, but inside I'm panicking.

The oncologist is lackadaisical and it makes me angry, but I know I have often been the same about patients who are terminal. Admit him, he suggests. But Josef refuses to go back into the hospital. I worry the drugs are making him confused, so I drive up to see him.

He is so thin, as if the cancer were consuming his very essence. He lies in bed and smiles when I enter the room. Sheila brings tea and we sit beside him. There is the smell of death about him. It is an unquantifiable smell one has to experience to understand, a grim smell of putrefaction.

He has not been able to eat anything for a week and is now taking huge quantities of narcotics, but the pain is still there.

"I can't shit," he complains, as if this were the last indignity.

I order homecare and an IV, but before it can be started Josef slips into a coma and quietly dies. We visit him one last time, kneel beside his body, stroke his hair, his cool cheek. I am overcome with emotion but it will be several months till I cry. Catherine is in tears.

EVERY PATIENT DEATH is accompanied by a sense of failure, if not pain, and then you get over it. But when someone you love dies, it's as if a door opens, a door the size of a garage door you haven't even been aware of. It exposes you, as if your world were a solid box and suddenly one of the walls is gone and you look out with vague dread. Josef's death was like that, and I've never felt the same since.

Anthony Jeffery is a family doctor who works in the Emergency Department in Peterborough, Ontario. His short fiction has been published in Grain and Doctor's Review. He is currently working on a novel.

HIV John

Ken Kirkwood

I could never forget John. For the four years John and I spent in university together in the early 1980s, I had never seen someone with such magnetism. He was one of those people who had a spiritual quality to them, which people noticed through his kindness, his open nature, and his distinct love of fun.

John was never afraid of risk. He embraced experimentation in his personal life; he didn't ponder risk, he did what he wanted to. He lived the clichés that beg us to “live for today,” or “find true happiness by silencing fear.” John did all of that. It was probably no wonder, considering everything he had gone through. John immigrated from somewhere far away. His parents, Dave and Susan Russell, fled their homeland in the middle of the night, carrying everything they had with them, including an eight-month-old John. They established themselves in the downtown core with a vibrant little grocery store that sold everything you could want. Even though they made most of their money off the wide array of canned goods and spices from their homeland, theirs was also one of the truly original spots in town. It didn't matter if neither of them spoke enough English to have discussions with most of their customers, their kind and caring nature made them favourites in the town, and their Johnny learned how to be a lovable person from their example. Even though I was very close to their son, I never really knew either of them. It was all quite understandable, since they were running the store eighteen hours every day of the week to support their Johnny, who was not going to fail because of them. They would do anything legal to help their boy achieve his goals in life, because that *was* their goal in life.

John stood proudly on the tall shoulders of his parents' support and entered business school with many honours and scholarships to help him along. He was the student who could do it all. He was one of the primary loci of fun on campus, as well as being a dedicated student and having an almost unrealistically positive relationship with his folks.

He was my best friend during those days. After graduation, we hugged for a long time in the college square, promising each other that we would never drift apart. John moved to a larger city that was at least eight hours away by car, and, despite our sincerest efforts, we started hearing less and less from each other. The growing distance from John, and my memories of him, often made me wonder what became of him. I had always envisioned John touching the lives of a whole group of new people in his new hometown. I felt a bit embarrassed that I wanted him to come back, because I had already felt his touch on my life and I had no right to monopolize that. Other people had the right to the same joy I did in being in life with him.

After ten years of gradually losing touch with John, I found myself working in the relatively new job as the clinical ethicist at our local hospital. The facility was a teaching hospital, closely linked to my alma mater's medical and nursing schools. I was happy in my work and it often made me think of John, who never ever made light of my choice to major in arts, while he was heading his class in the more profitable studies in business.

I was going through the motions one day and stopped in on a new patient who had been giving the nurses grief. I walked down the hall to the room. Even in hospital—where death is daily and the staff with long tenures turn the grotesque into the humorous—we are all occasionally caught off-guard by the sight of a patient's state. The man who faced me was bone thin and marked by deep purple sores all over his body. When I caught myself staring, I pushed myself back into professional mode and introduced myself. I noticed that the spots were actually raised bumps on his skin. I tried starting up a conversation with the patient, trying to avoid the trouble he had been giving others, thinking I might be able to get close enough to this man that he might listen to me. Even as I spoke, he turned his head away from me. I kept talking to him, and finally his head lopped over the pillow, as if it was all the energy in

this life he had left to spend, but kept his eyes lightly closed. I kept talking to him about how nervous the nurses were and tried to make some connection with him, when he suddenly opened his eyes to fix me with a look. When I finished my rehearsed comments, he simply grunted and rolled his head ever so slowly back to face the other direction. I considered the matter concluded and walked out.

When I am confronted with such pain, such disfigurement, and I look straight into the kind of death I hope to avoid for myself and my loved ones, I become easily confused. Maybe it is because I shut down my perceptions—I limit my sensory input because what I can sense is too horrific, and my mind saves me from knowing the whole truth.

However and why it happened, I don't know. But as I was chatting with the charge nurse about my conversation and what I thought was a conclusion to his misbehaviour, she casually dropped the patient's name "John Russell" into our discussion. As she talked, I went into a complete emotional free fall. Those eyes . . . I had seen those eyes before. They were once brilliant but now were gateways to everyone's most dreaded fate. I cut the nurse off and asked what was wrong with Mr. Russell. She examined the hooks of clipboards and pulled one off and began flipping through the pages. "AIDS. But the lesions are Kaposi sarcoma. This won't take long."

I walked back to Mr. Russell's room, hoping somewhat guiltily that this was some other John Russell. I saw him there, nearer to death than he had been only two hours before. His head was facing me squarely this time, and his eyes opened to narrow slits as he looked at me. I looked as deeply into his face as I could, desperately wanting to know if my world would make it through what I might learn. He looked straight back at me through a mask of pain, and there could be no confusion and no denial. I was looking at John, the best man I had ever known.

After a quiet departure and a long time alone, I learned some important things about the John of today. John's love of partying and emerging career in high-level corporate finance had put him squarely into a party scene that involved needle drugs. John, in a sad turn for his devil-may-care identity, had become the guy who would always volunteer to be first, and more tragically, last to shoot up in a room full of partiers. I had so many questions to ask him, but I finally was able to focus on the

questions that mattered most to the John I was about to see, not the John I once knew.

I returned to his room, the look of recognition on both our faces was unmistakable. I sat down with him and we talked for hours about his life and situation. He dodged my questions with sparkles of old John's wit. Finally I squared him with some direct questions about it all. "Johnny, do your folks know about this?" I knew Johnny's parents were still downtown, but I had no idea if they even knew their son was here, let alone that he was in such dire shape. John affirmed that his parents knew he was here and had been to see him regularly, but I had missed them. He told me that his prognosis was terminal and that he was basically counting the days and considering what waited for him after he died. I asked if he had heard about the new program for palliative care where he could die at home if he so desired. I told him it would be more his style, but that his folks would have to take part in it. I arranged to be there with a few of the physicians the next time his parents came, and we would, through Johnny, explain the options to them.

The Russells came into the room a few minutes earlier than the appointed time. The minute they entered the doorway, Mrs. Russell hurried to the bedside to tend to Johnny. Mr. Russell lingered by the door, making eye contact and nodding to all of us, but content to stay on the perimeter. Johnny spoke to his mom quickly, gesturing to me, and when he had finished, Mrs. Russell enfolded me in a deep hug. I couldn't understand a word she was saying, but she told me how much she had appreciated my friendship with Johnny and the work I was doing now—I just know she did.

After things turned to the business of Johnny's death, we discussed as best we could what the best circumstance was for John's life. Everyone agreed that John would spend his last days at home, with homecare nursing. At one point, Mr. Russell stood up and began to tell us a deeply passionate story. John stopped trying to translate for us and simply lay there, like us, mesmerized by a father's pride. I watched as the old man's finger stabbed the air with emphasis. Eventually, Mr. Russell collapsed in his chair, despondent, emotionally spent, quickly tended to by his wife. John, in another reminder of the old John, summed up his father's lengthy monologue by saying, "Dad wants me to die at his house!"

In the days following that meeting, arrangements were made, and through some miracle, one of our nurses knew a colleague who spoke the same mother tongue as the Russells. So now John wouldn't have to suffer through endless bouts of translation for which he had no strength. John's parents were coming back to the hospital for education and training about precautions for infectious diseases. It was likely that Mrs. Russell would come into contact with body fluids, and we had to ensure that she knew what to expect. I met the nurse and the Russells shortly thereafter. The nurse spoke with the parents with a lovely caring spirit. Once it seemed that everyone was getting along, I left them, to continue on with my day.

Later I was paged. The nurse was clearly unhappy, apparently with me. "You are aware that they don't know their son has AIDS. They think he has cancer, and I didn't tell them any different." I didn't want to talk to this nurse again. She was lying, she was confused. She and I weren't on the same page, because we hadn't worked together before. There was some reason she was wrong and I knew whom to ask about it. I hustled down the hall to John's room and turned the corner. I could clear up this mess with a few quick words.

"John, your folks know you have AIDS, right?"

John's face never changed. His eyes were open, fixed dead centre on the television screen, and it looked as if he were already dead.

"John?" I said, with panic in my voice, "do your parents know that you have AIDS?"

John continued to ignore me. He looked straight ahead, as if he were confronting the answer to his final question.

"John!" I yelled, "did you fucking tell your parents about your AIDS or didn't you!" I was beyond angry at this point. I saw everything crashing down around me. The ideal death I saw for John, the comforting story of a loving family, the fable wrapping the truth with a fabric of death, was all coming undone.

John began to cry. He told me that he had not told his parents, and he had left it out of every discussion with the doctors that he had translated for his folks. After John had poured all his emotion into the room, he implored me not to tell his parents. He told me that it was absolutely certain that his parents would conclude that he had contracted AIDS

from gay sex. For the older Russells, homosexuality was the ultimate religious, moral, and personal disgrace. They hated it for many reasons, and would not and could not tolerate it in their own home, even at the expense of their son's last days. They would find it hard, but they could not be moved from a belief so fundamental, and once they knew that their son had AIDS, they would never let him back in their home.

"So, what you're saying is, if we tell your folks, they will refuse to let you die at home. But if we don't tell them, they'll stay like they are?"

John nodded and hung his head, as did I. I had the feeling that we were trying to figure out how to clean up after the end of the world.

I sat at a table and began to tell people what we knew about John's palliative care. I told them about his lies, I told them about his parents' prejudices, and I laid out the dilemma as it had stricken me a few hours ago in that awful hospital room. All of them looked down at their paperwork, avoiding being the one to push this no-win discussion in any direction. We stared at each other for minutes, until they became an hour. Trained professionals could give advice, none of which they believed. Some looked to me. After all, I was the ethicist. I should take the lead in setting us on the "right" course of action. I couldn't. I couldn't be the person to destroy this family. Next time this happened, I would do what was right, but this time, this time was just too complicated. Surely all the authors of all the ethics texts in the world had not foreseen what we were going through right this second.

Finally, possibly in a final effort to have someone else fix the problem for us, and especially for me, I presented the dilemma: "If we tell the parents, they will disown the kid, and leave him here to die—alone, unloved, a reject. If we don't tell them, they will openly love him, care for him, and he can die surrounded by his cultural beliefs and a loving family in familiar surroundings. Somebody say something!"

Donna, the always-vocal nurse who had cared for John and never had to be asked twice to offer common sense, asked, "Do you honestly think that the mom is going to wear gloves to clean up her boy?! If she's anything like my mom, she's thinking that I wiped his bum when he was an infant, and I'm sure not going to wear any gloves to do it now. You'll expose that poor woman to infection, and it will be the fault of everyone here!" Donna got up and left the room, disgusted with everyone.

Prompted by her emotional leadership, a member of management said that legally we had no option. We could never send a patient home and expose unwitting people to his illness. He was sorry, but there was no way we could do it.

After he had finished, everyone left quietly.

We could have rationalized what had happened. We could all have said that we had wanted something else to happen, but management or the lawyers had stopped us. But even those who thought it was the right thing to do didn't win. Everyone lost. I felt as if I had lost the most: John, myself, and my courage.

I never returned to John's room. I just couldn't do it. We probably reached the correct decision that day, even if we didn't want to. On the other hand, we made the decision on the basis of what could have been, but in the meantime we created something very real and immediate. John's parents withdrew their agreement to take John in. They never came back to speak with any of us, including John.

I stood outside John's door for hours over the last three months of his life. I stood there, thinking, "I'm going in," but then John would vomit, or pass into unconsciousness, so I would be spared. The day he died—December 2, 1994—marked the day that being right, or thinking I was morally right, meant nothing to me anymore.

Ken Kirkwood teaches at the University of Western Ontario. Fifteen years ago, he was certain he would die, but now he thrives. His life's joys are his wife Susanne and daughter Solange.

IV Contrast

Sion Roy

As you watch me crawl through the
Cramped quarters of these coronary arteries
On a mega modern movie screen,
You picture a plaque full of foul fat,
Cholesterol, and triglycerides.
And perhaps you judge.

But I'm an eyewitness to this slimy scene.
You're simply the reporter.
Behind me, I see rigid remnants of
A man up at midnight
Carrying a frozen pepperoni pizza in his left hand
And a dirty diaper in his right.
On my left is smoky, sticky tar
Stockpiled during smoke breaks
From his divorce proceedings.
To my right, the cheap cheeseburgers
He ate during his depression.
Downstream, I see the gallon of chocolate
Ice cream he binged on last night.

All around me, I see a human life lived.
Not to be judged.
Just here to be saved.
I'll show you the way.

Sion Roy is a graduate from Johns Hopkins University and Medical College of Virginia. He is an internal medicine resident at Georgetown University Hospital and is applying for cardiology fellowship.

Discussion Guide

What Disturbs Our Blood

James FitzGerald refers to his grandfather's "unpardonable sin" but does not state what it is. Given that he is a physician, do you sense that the sin might be related to a medical misdemeanour? If so why? If not, why not?

Morning Report

The narrator recognizes that he is having a stroke, yet he is not a physician. How does the reader know that he is correct, and how does the narrator have this knowledge?

Migraine Sestina

How does the description of migraine headaches in this poem differ from the textbook definition? What does this tell you about the limits of a standard history of illness?

The Cancer Poems

How does the author use humour to cope with uncertainty? How can writing be therapeutic for people (or their loved ones) living with cancer? Write a story about a time you tried to bargain with fate when faced with adversity.

The Drama of the Daytime Sky

How do the subject's reflections on the permanence, solitude, and quiet of the natural world—in contrast to the noise and transience of human lives—provide insight into her methods of dealing with her mastectomy? Which images are persuasive and which are distracting?

The Gift That Keeps on Giving

How does the culture of masculinity evoked by the father's and son's respective family stories illuminate their relationship?

Ars Medica

Subscriptions

2010–2011 (four issues)

\$45 (CDN/US) individual

\$65 (CDN/US) institution

Name _____

Address _____

Please make check or money order payable to

Ars Medica

Attn. Liz Konigshaus, Room 925

Mount Sinai Hospital

600 University Avenue, Toronto, Canada M5G 1X5

Subscribe online at www.utpjournals.com/subscribe.

Donations towards *Ars Medica* are also welcome, through the Mount Sinai Hospital Foundation. Please contact arsmedica@mtsinai.on.ca. All donations are tax deductible, and receipts will be provided.