

# KALEIDOSCOPE

EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF DISABILITY THROUGH LITERATURE AND THE FINE ARTS

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## THE JOURNEY CONTINUES—PART II

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*"Gary, Still" by Peg Daniels*

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*"Lines in a Notebook" by Feliks Jezioranski*

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*"My Journey with Multiple Sclerosis" by Barbara Hosbach*

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Jeff Hanson, *Secrets of St. Lucia*, 2016, acrylic on heavily-textured canvas, 30" x 30"

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*This award-winning publication expresses the experience of disability from a variety of perspectives including: individuals, families, friends, caregivers, healthcare professionals, and educators, among others. The material chosen for Kaleidoscope challenges stereotypical, patronizing, and sentimental attitudes about disabilities.*



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# MY JOURNEY WITH MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

BARBARA HOSBACH

“Good news! You have MS!” That’s how the doctor announced my diagnosis of multiple sclerosis back in 1993. He meant I was lucky it wasn’t a brain tumor, but at the time I didn’t feel lucky. I felt stunned.

In a daze, I left the doctor’s office with my husband. He was driving because I had double vision. Even without it, I was in no condition to drive. We stopped at my office so I could let my boss know that I wouldn’t be back to work for at least a month. My administrator stopped me in the hall and asked me how I was. That’s when it hit me.

“I have MS,” I sobbed, collapsing into her arms. My husband stood by helplessly, not knowing what to do. I didn’t know what to do, either. We rode home in silence while scary questions bombarded my brain.

*What’s going to happen to me? Am I going to die? Will I need a wheelchair? How will I take care of my daughter if I can’t take care of myself?*

Panic set in. Then I did some research and learned that MS is a chronic illness, not a death sentence. It affects the central nervous system, damaging the nerves that carry information between the brain and the body. Depending on which nerves are affected, symptoms can vary widely from person to person, and from time to time within the same individual.

As I learned more, I found that I had the relapsing-remitting form of the disease. This milder form of MS is characterized by intermittent symptom flareups called “attacks” or “exacerbations,” followed by periods of symptom reduction.

My first exacerbation began with double vision, which gave me a staggering headache. I was so dizzy I couldn’t stand up without falling. I was hospitalized to confirm the diagnosis and hooked up to an intravenous steroid that eventually relieved the inflammation in my brain.

Once the MS attack subsided, I no longer needed a cane to steady myself, but I still had invisible symptoms to contend with. Numbness, pins and needles, and burning sensations in my arms and legs came and went. They were merely annoying.

Chronic fatigue caused me more trouble. It wasn’t apparent to others, and their well-meaning comments only irritated me. I translated “You look so good, Barb,” into “You’re either faking it or exaggerating, because you don’t *look* sick.”

More importantly, I was forced to slow down. There should be a special word for MS fatigue. When I said I felt tired, people often responded, “I’m tired, too.” That was frustrating. What I meant was, “Who sucked the life force out of my body?”

Once, at work, I started to cry because I didn’t know how I was going to hold myself erect at my desk all day. One night, while lying face down, I came close to suffocating; I felt too weary to push my face away from the pillow. Another night, I even dreamt that I was sleeping! Now, *that’s* fatigue.

While fatigue is a luxury problem compared to the difficulties many others struggle with, for me it was devastating because, prior to my diagnosis, I thrived on hyperactivity.

Like many other women, being a wife and mother while working full time and honoring a host of outside commit-

ments, I was perpetually busy. I loved it. If I wasn't doing two things simultaneously, I felt as if I was wasting time. My tendency to tidy up other rooms while cooking set off the smoke alarm more than once. Sometimes I came home from work and started making dinner without even taking off my coat.

When my daughter, Jen, was little, she and my husband often played in the living room while I cooked. I resented their laughter but never joined them. After all, I had too much to do. If I didn't do it, who would?

The more tasks I got done, the more I added to my "to do" list. I cooked from scratch, attended school programs, kept house, and pitched in at church functions, all while putting in a forty-hour workweek. I helped even when my help wasn't needed or wanted, to prove I was a good wife and mother. Permanently frazzled, I proudly did my duty.

Bone-crushing MS weariness brought up a host of new worries. All my self-esteem was invested in my productivity. Who would I be if I couldn't work hard? Would my life still have value? Would my family still love me if I became a liability instead of an asset?

I definitely had issues to address. All I needed was the energy to do it.

Unfortunately, my energy was in short supply. Although I loved to read in bed, after the MS attack, even that took too much effort at times. That's why I began meditating. I'm not proud to admit that I started spending time with God only when I had "nothing better to do."

But God took me any way he could get me. Before this, prayer meant me doing all the talking. Now prayer became a two-way street as I took time to listen in my heart for a response.

The prayer would go:

God, why me?

*Why not you?*

But I'm scared, Lord.

*It's OK. I've got it all under control.*

But what about Jen? I can't be there for her like I used to.

*You're not meant to be. Your little girl is almost grown. Besides, I love her even more than you do. Let go and leave her to me.*

What good am I? I can't work hard anymore.

*Do you really think you are valuable only because of what you do?*

Yes! I feel useless and unlovable.

*Love is a gift; you don't earn it. You can't.*

Why would anybody love me if I can't do things for them?

*You are lovable just because I breathed you into existence.*

What should I do?

*Don't try so hard.*

But what about the future?

*I'll be there when you get there. Don't worry. I have a plan. Just stay close to me today. Everything is unfolding exactly as it should. Meanwhile, just rest in me.*

I began to feel loved for the person I was and forgiven for my shortsighted attempts to force a good home life by trying too hard. I felt hope that my needs and those of my family would be met. I felt encouraged that God would continue to teach me this new way of life. I didn't have to learn it all instantly.

I began to count my blessings. My husband was there when I needed him. My daughter was past childhood. My friends helped by giving me rides while I couldn't drive and by listening to me.

When I was ready, I was able to step back into the workplace with little problem. I began to see that God is always there for me, whether I think I need him or not, and that "rest" is not a four-letter word. Now I had plenty of time and just enough courage to look at the issues that terrified me.

As I got honest with myself, I discovered that my motives for working so hard at being helpful—both in and outside my home—were not completely altruistic. Underneath genuine caring lurked the feeling I needed to earn the love of others, to earn my right to use the air I breathe.

I got a sense of security from trusting my own ability and securing relationships by doing things for others to earn their approval. Not being able to do this anymore rocked me to the core. I would never have recognized this or admitted it if MS had not forced me to slow down.

While at a church function, I remember feeling weak and needing to sit down. Someone kindly brought me a folding chair, and it broke my heart. I would much rather be the one helping than being helped.

Mixed with my unselfish motives was the fear that if I didn't take care of others, why would they want me around? Also, being in a position to help someone else gave me a sense of superiority, or at least the illusion of security on some level. I trusted my strength and willingness to work to keep me secure on both practical and social levels.

Since I didn't have much choice about cutting back on helping others or needing help myself, I began to learn humility. Sometimes it can be more of a blessing to receive and allow others to be blessed by giving. Surprisingly, healthy humility paves the way for healthy self-esteem. We all have a right to be here, because God loved us into existence. Understanding that empowers us to grow.

Forced by MS to stop driving myself relentlessly, I've learned to look at my energy as money in the bank. If I spent it on "x," I didn't have any or had less to spend on "y." I learned to prioritize by evaluating whether a task was truly necessary and, if so, whether it needed immediate attention or not. Learning to delegate was trickier.

Trying to control my family didn't work. Micromanaging caused conflict and earned me the nickname "The General." Others may or may not do chores fast enough or neatly enough to suit me. I began to learn acceptance.

By doing less and resting more, I became easier to live with. No longer worn out, I didn't snap at my family as much. I invested more of my energy into my relationships and my own well-being.

I also developed more patience and understanding for people who couldn't, or wouldn't, work as hard as I once did. Trying too hard hadn't earned me the approval I longed for. It made me smug and irritable.

I'd always had limitations; it was just easier to pretend I didn't before the MS hit. I began taking breaks instead of always going full speed ahead. This gave me more time for conversations with friends. Sometimes they needed to talk about their own limitations or fears. Now I had more time to listen and offer encouragement by sharing my own experiences.

I've had three MS attacks since the first one in 1993. Each time, the acute symptoms subsided within a month or two. Five years after my first exacerbation, amid much prayer and soul-searching, I separated from my first husband.

I survived a second MS attack shortly thereafter, while living alone. That prospect had always terrified me, but God provided everything I needed. My first marriage ultimately ended in divorce and annulment.

In 2004, while recovering from my third MS exacerbation, I met a wonderful man. We were married in 2006. My daughter Jen has grown into a fine young woman. She and her husband have two beautiful children who are my delight. I retired from the job I held for thirty-three years, thirteen of which were after my initial MS attack. After retirement I followed my lifelong love of writing and am now a freelance writer, speaker, and workshop facilitator.

My energy level has improved, but I still contend with some limitations. God has been there through the highs and lows, guiding, comforting, and teaching me. I've learned some life-enhancing truths that I'd never have noticed or come to terms with if MS hadn't slowed me down.

The fatigue created an atmosphere where I could truly "be still and know" God while facing what needed changing in my attitude. In the process, I've come to know myself better, my relationships with others have improved, and my love and understanding of God have deepened.

My self-worth depends not on how much I do, but on accepting who I am: a child of God with strengths and weaknesses like everybody else. This being so, I can stop the mental contest of comparing myself with others.

It's safe to relate to others more honestly. When I'm not running on empty, I naturally have more to give. As a child of God, I'm known and cared for by the one who works for good in all circumstances. If I look for the good, I'll find it. That truly is good news!◆

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CHERIE BOWERS

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## SAW WAS WAS

Saw was was and was was saw.  
 I never could see the difference.  
     My teachers told me, "That's not right."  
     My sister showed me, "Look, like this."  
 But as always, saw was was and was was saw.

Because saw was was and was was saw,  
 I put on a new pair of glasses.  
     My mother told me, "Don't lose them."  
     My father showed me, "See, like mine."  
 Yet it remained, saw was was and was was saw.

Even though saw was was and was was saw,  
 I went to the state college.  
     My professor told me, "Use have seen for saw."  
     My roommate showed me, "Write has been for was."  
 Finally, saw no longer was was.

Now each spring, I use my hand-have seen  
     to trim my lilacs.  
 A prettier sight, there never has been.

WILLIAM H. McCANN, JR.

## JOE'S GOODBYE, JUNE 1965

"My parents are here."  
 He was my best friend.  
 We didn't know what to do.  
 Finally, we shook hands—  
     Ten-year-old adults—  
 And he walked away.

# AUTHENTIC SIGNS

SUSAN DUKE

Fairy tales hardly ever come true for quiet girls. Lila suspected as much while navigating the twists and turns of junior high and was convinced by her sophomore year at Middleton Consolidated. She observed perfumed and eager peers surging around her in the halls, classrooms, and cafeteria. The loud, giggly, and pretty girls primped at their lockers, ready for their next adventure and conquest. And succeed they did.

Confident girls who dressed in the latest fashions, knew how to flip lustrous highlighted hair, and were tuned in to the latest gossip, snared the cute boys, and sailed through day after day preparing for weekend dates. Lila often watched their mouths. What in the world could they be talking about? While she listened attentively to her instructors (more interested in their cadence and tone than the lessons), the favored girls passed notes and longed for forbidden cell phones and attention from the boys.

Lila learned to keep to herself. With her unruly curls and dusky complexion, she created her own world of handsome suitors and princes. Miss Baker, the much feared school librarian, had Lila pegged as a loner and hard worker. A solitary sort herself, she became intrigued with the quiet girl and encouraged her student helper to enjoy free reign in the stacks. Nonjudgmental with Lila, Miss Baker perched behind her desk watching for infractions of a long list of rules and relished her power to banish any student to the dreaded and boring study hall.

The serenity of the library grew to be an oasis in an otherwise hectic day. For one hour, Lila surrounded herself with friends leaping from pages and memorized text in quite a variety of genres. Without leaving this lovely, musty room,

she embraced an imaginary world of fiction and facts. At times, called upon to assist a student who had undoubtedly procrastinated on an essay or other project, Lila was subjected to scrutiny. Miss Baker would frown and discourage any teasing or bullying behavior.

One rainy Friday, the most popular boy in the senior class made eye contact with the quiet girl and asked, "Do you go to school here? What's your name?"

Lila blinked and Miss Baker shushed the young man. Life went on.

Over a decade later, Lila had achieved her library-tech certificate and thought of moving to a larger city with a library containing a more extensive collection. She could be useful and still enjoy the bounty of books she craved. Who needed people intruding in her personal life?

"Go, honey. We want you to be happy."

Lila cringed as her mother's elegant hands danced with her intensity. Who spilled the beans? Grandma. That's what Lila got for confiding in someone. Oh no. What if Grandma had told her parents how much their only child wanted to move out on her own?

Gentle pressure raised her chin.

"Lila. You're twenty-nine. Almost thirty! Dad and I are just fine, sweetheart. Go. Do what you want to do."

Tears threatened behind Lila's eyelids. Almost from infancy, Lila had been the buffer between their silence and

the hearing world. How could she just leave them? She looked around at the comfortable existence the three of them shared—the telecommunication device that flashed a red light for incoming phone calls typed out on a read-out panel, the doorbell and security system lights, their phone chargers on the coffee table to remind them to keep cell phones charged and ready for texting.

“Lila.”

The sound of her name caused her to jump as if she’d been struck by lightning. In almost thirty years she’d heard her father’s voice less than ten times. Able to speak, he’d chosen the mute life, preferring sign and lipreading for communication. Stricken with measles and mumps as a boy, his hearing faded before his fifth birthday. Jack Gentry had never considered himself disabled. His career as a graphic artist continued to flourish with the advent of computer programs. Lila occasionally accompanied her father on trips to confer with clients in order to interpret spoken language into signs he could fully understand.

Lila’s mother could also read lips and was extremely proficient with sign. Maggie Gentry won accolades as an illustrator of children’s books and had enough business to keep her busy for a hundred years. Being selective with clients allowed her time to explore and develop a series of books designed for deaf children. Together she and Jack had created a world of art, color, and texture that required no sound. After fifteen years of marriage, they were surprised and delighted to have a baby, a hearing child at that. They really had a good life.

“Dad,” Lila whispered and signed. “You startled me.”

He looked at his lovely daughter and signed, “You are welcome to live here forever if you want. We love you more than life itself. But we never would want to hold you back.”

Lila reassured them as best as she could. During dinner the atmosphere seemed normal. All three discussed what had transpired during the day. Lila watched the magical interaction between her parents. She could easily read their hand signs. She was a part of that. But here and there she detected unique signals only the two of them shared—a look in

their eyes, intimate body language, grins, and smiles. Yup, these two intelligent and gifted people really loved each other even after all these years.

As she slowly chewed tender roast beef, she wondered, *Do I really want that with someone? Am I missing out on something?* An unexpected tingle in her brain . . . Lila gave a slight shake of her head. Not really. If she became lonely for romance, right in the “A” section of the library she could put her hands on Mr. Darcy anytime she wanted. Princes, kings, pirates, and modern day heroes were at her disposal. She didn’t have to manufacture clever conversation or appear charming. Right there in the serenity of familiar territory she was secure and content.

A tapping on the table interrupted her reverie. Lila’s eyebrows rose as she looked at her mother.

“I asked if anyone interesting came into the library today.”

Lila laughed. One of her parents asked her that almost every night. With signs not quite as graceful as her mother’s, she related a funny incident about an elderly gentleman who had pulled out a messy sandwich in the research department. Linda was horrified. Egg salad slopped all over the desk and you know how that smell permeates. She insisted he leave or at least get rid of the sandwich. He ignored her until he finished eating and then proceeded to get up and without a word meander through various world atlases.

“Maybe he was deaf,” Jack signed.

Lila and her mother rolled their eyes at each other and laughed. The Gentry sense of humor must be genetic.

As familiar sounds of the house settling in for the night surrounded Lila, she said her evening prayers and clicked on her bedside lamp. She glanced at her little television and considered an episode of *Murder, She Wrote*. No, the new Patricia Cornwell beckoned. She eagerly fluffed her pillows, opened the book and scanned the cover blurb. What trouble would Kay Scarpetta thrust herself into now?

On Monday Lila arrived at Fondulac District Library early as usual. Storm clouds threatened a dreary day, but she knew that would not deter faithful patrons from browsing.

Book club would meet at one thirty and she needed to have next month's selection ready for the Bifocal Bookers as they called themselves. That group of retired ladies could get rowdy sometimes. Oh, and a preschool group was arriving at ten. Linda always curled her lip at the thought of sticky fingers on any furniture or pages. Better have the Handi Wipes nearby.

"Morning, kiddo," her director said. "Think it's going to rain today? Hope people remember to keep the books covered as they come and go. Maybe we shouldn't have stopped passing out plastic bags."

Lila thought of environmental concerns and shook her head. "I think most patrons have those cloth bags we started selling last year. Hmm, I admit our only copy of the *Titanic* DVD did get ruined when that kid dropped it in a snow bank."

Lila marveled at how at ease she felt around her crotchety boss. She knew Linda's bark was worse than her bite. Underneath a rough exterior, she was a truly warm and compassionate human being. Without thinking, Lila found herself talking more around her than anyone else. Audible words were a reserved treasure of Lila Gentry.

As she started the coffee in the staff lounge, she made the connection. Linda reminded her of Miss Baker, the old librarian in high school. Hmm, another person who had shown understanding and kindness to a shy, quiet girl.

"Scones and muffins," Linda said as she set a box on the table. "I know, nothing fattening or unhealthy for you. I brought a few multigrains. Pour me a cup, will you, and let's relax for a minute before the rest of the staff arrives."

As the two women sat in comfortable silence, Lila wondered when Linda would get to the point of what was on her mind. She could read her friend like a book. When Linda sighed, Lila readied herself for whatever was coming.

"I ran into your grandma in the bakery."

For heaven's sake. In a town of twenty-three thousand, you'd think . . .

"She's concerned about you, kiddo. She thinks you're stuck in a rut."

Uneasy quiet stretched until Lila drew a deep breath and said, "It's my rut."

"I'll just ask. Are you wanting to quit and get away from here?"

Lila's lips tightened. She stared at her hands as her arms suddenly felt heavy. Not wanting to rock the boat, she settled on denial.

"No, no. I don't know where Grandma gets these crazy ideas. All I said was I wish I could be more useful."

"To whom? Surely not your parents. They are more independent and competent than most people I know. Didn't they meet at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C.?"

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## Audible words were a reserved treasure of Lila Gentry.

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Lila nodded. All this talking was hurting her ears. She felt a personal affront about being put in this situation. Although her mouth felt like the Sahara, she swallowed a lump in her throat. Intrusion into her private life threatened her security. She raised her eyes. Linda wasn't scary or nosy. She was a friend. Before Lila realized what was happening, her hands danced in graceful motion like waves on an evening tide.

"Linda, I truly feel blessed with my life. I love being here in the library. If I need independence, I have enough saved to rent an apartment. I just might do that. I have no intention of moving away from Middleton. Please believe me." Lila hated the whining and pleading that was creeping into her voice.

Her boss stood and poured a second cup of coffee. "Okay, sweetie. Didn't mean to upset you."

"I'm . . . I'm not upset."

"Your hands were flying, kiddo. They do that when you want to emphasize something and I for one think it's lovely."

Embarrassed, Lila clasped her hands on the table. "If I'm dissatisfied with anything, it's just that I wish I could do more. Be better at something. I just don't know what. I feel like I'm waiting for something."

"Or someone."

"Linda, really. Life is not a fairy tale." Lila glanced at the clock. "Wow. We'd best get a move on." She rose, rinsed out her mug, and hurried into the children's section of the library. Brightly colored seasonal decorations welcomed all who entered. Lila located the books the preschool teacher

had selected, nodding in approval. She retrieved the carpet squares from the large storage closet and set crayon buckets on several low tables. "Let's see," she whispered to herself. "Anything I forgot?" She smiled. Of course, the drawing paper. Can't draw Clifford the Big Red Dog without paper.

Linda appreciated having a staff member close when a group of children visited the library, but Lila needed no urging. By using pleasant facial expressions and gentle gestures, she easily steered eager little bodies in the right direction. After Miss Karcher enthralled the boys and girls with a stirring rendition of *Clifford's Pals* and *Clifford's Bath Time*, she led them in discussion of things they would like to do with the big red dog before turning them loose with crayons and paper at the tables.

Lila's attention drew to an adorable little boy with brown bangs in his eyes, thin arms, and boundless energy. He flapped his hands and made cooing noises as the story progressed. The other children ignored him and he returned the favor. Lila had studied autism while in college and been thrilled to attend a lecture by the famed expert Temple Grandin. She treasured her books autographed by Miss Grandin. The connection between thinking in pictures and communication disorders seemed somehow related to the deaf community.

"I see you're interested in Ricky," Miss Karcher said. She and Lila stepped back a few paces to observe the group and give them free rein as the children chatted quietly and drew pictures of Clifford in various situations.

"Did he just join your class?"

"Yes, his parents are at their wit's end with him. He's four already and has had hardly any early intervention. I think they subscribed to the 'If I ignore it, he'll outgrow it' theory. His diagnosis is Asperger's but I feel he's more severely autistic."

"Maybe they were scared," Lila whispered as she observed Ricky gazing about. She and the teacher each took a red marker and approached the table. As they went from child to child, they asked the boy or girl to describe their picture. Lila smiled as each dictated a caption for the adult to print under the picture. She had bent down and was writing *Clifford and I are space men and are going to the moon* on a little boy's paper when out of the corner of her eye she noticed Ricky rocking back and forth in his chair. Without touching the child, she quietly came behind him and steadied the chair.

"Wow, Ricky," she said using a placid tone. He had used a red crayon to scribble around and around on the paper. "Hmm, let's see. Oh, I know, *Clifford can run circles*

*around everyone.* Good job." She stood and moved away from the table.

"Okay, boys and girls, it's time to check out books. Remember, if you pull a book out and decide you don't want it, just set it back on top of the shelf."

Lila smiled again. Too many times the library staff needed to reshelve books after children shoved them in haphazardly. After assisting a few kids, she noticed Ricky hopping from one foot to the other in front of a display of colorful books about the railroad.

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## **Lila's attention drew to an adorable little boy with brown bangs in his eyes, thin arms, and boundless energy.**

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"Do you like trains, Ricky? Let's pick out a book." Lila put her palms together and opened them, keeping her little fingers touching. "Book," she said as she repeated the gesture in the child's line of sight even though he appeared to not be paying attention.

"You're brave," Linda said to Miss Karcher as she checked out the books on the teacher's library card. "In the years I've known you, you've had to pay for only one book."

"We don't let the kids take them home. The books do come in handy at rest time. You should see them lie on their cots and pretend like they're reading. That's actually a pre-reading skill."

Lila assisted lining up the children as the school van pulled in front of the door. She watched Ricky being herded aboard as he seemed oblivious to all around him. *He's really not missing a thing*, she thought. *That little guy has a lot going on.*

"You seemed at home with those kids, even that one boy," Linda said later as they sat down in the staff lounge for lunch.

Lila nodded and thought, *I can't wait until Wednesday.*

As autumn leaves fell announcing the change of seasons, Lila eagerly anticipated each interaction with Ricky. Although he gave her no eye contact and did not initiate spontaneous conversation, he sought her out in close proximity

and imitated signs and words she said to him. He did not show interest in any Halloween activities even as the other children eagerly sought out every book related to the holiday and laughed as they made decorations. He displayed more fascination with all the letters and numbers surrounding him in the library.

One day as the class cut out pumpkins and ghosts, Lila had an idea. She sat down and as she fingerspelled “R-i-c-k-y” she said each letter out loud. Just when she decided her experiment failed, Miss Karcher whispered into her ear, “Casually look to your right.”

Lila stifled a gasp as she saw Ricky imitating her finger movements and saying “Ricky” under his breath. “That’s right, Ricky. That’s you. R-i-c-k-y. Ricky.”

“Do me. Do me.”

Before she realized what was happening, five other children clamored for Lila to fingerspell and say their names. Ricky tolerated the activity for a few minutes and then began to stomp his feet and flap his hands.

“Someone’s jealous,” Miss Karcher said.

Lila laughed and said to Ricky, “You have to take your turn, Big Boy.” When she finally returned her attention to him, he said, “Do me.”

Miss Karcher’s eyes widened. Later, she explained meaningful conversation had been rare, but at school he had been signing “book,” “bathroom,” and a few other words Lila had taught him.

Linda appeared delighted with the progress Lila was making with Ricky. On the days he attended and seemed to forget or refuse to display anything he’d learned, she reminded Lila that children with autism and those with chromosomal abnormalities experienced good days and bad days.

“Remember Temple Grandin explained that in one of her books? See? I read them before I handed them back to you.”

Lila nodded. There was so much to learn. Maybe she should take a few more classes concerning children with special needs at the local community college. She couldn’t decide. Working with Ricky for an hour twice a week was only temporary. Next year he would be in kindergarten. She pursed her lips. Who did she think she was? She needed a sign. It came the following Monday.

Miss Karcher approached her as soon as she and another assistant had the children settled and attending to a book about Thanksgiving.

“Lila, is there some place we could talk?”

Lila’s heart pounded in her chest as Linda said, “Sure, we have a meeting room right around the corner there. Take all the time you need.”

*What was wrong? Am I in trouble for over-stepping boundaries with Ricky or one of the other kids? As she and the teacher she respected so much sat, Lila’s mind whirled. She would be so upset if she couldn’t work with the kids anymore.*

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**Lila stifled a gasp as she saw Ricky imitating her finger movements and saying “Ricky” under his breath. “That’s right, Ricky. That’s you. R-i-c-k-y. Ricky.”**

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“Well, our time is limited so I’ll get right to the point, okay?”

Lila nodded as her ears hummed.

“First, Lila, you have a B.A., right? From Westover College?”

*Why has she been checking up on me? Did Linda talk about me? She nodded.*

“I’ve been teaching preschool and special education for fifteen years. That’s why the district put Ricky in my class. He is responding, albeit slowly, to techniques I’m implementing. See, I’m one of those people who doesn’t take anything personally. If a certain method isn’t proving effective after a reasonable time, I reevaluate and perhaps scrap it. Of course, documentation and accountability are required in public school.”

She sighed and placed her hands on the polished table. Lila frowned and waited.

“I feel it’s time for a change, Lila, and I’m hoping you feel the same.”

Sitting on the far side of the table, Lila could glance out at the rest of the library. Her toes twitched inside her shoes as she longed to jump up and run out into her sanctuary. She could be upstairs with her hands on *Pride and Prejudice* within seconds. Mr. Darcy could be speaking to her, calm-

ing her down, and offering her the universe. She looked back at Miss Karcher. Oh my, she was still talking.

“And I told Mr. Knight, my principal, I was open to accepting more special needs children in my class if I could have an additional aide. Lila, I feel you’re a natural.”

Lila gasped aloud. “I . . . I majored in language and communications with a minor in English literature. I’m not qualified to . . .”

“You display more common sense than a lot of teachers I know. Don’t ever repeat that.” She stood. “Let me check on Ann and see if everything is under control.”

A germ of a headache began over Lila’s right eye. All this talking. Was she offering her a job? Lila’s world would have to change. Could she still work part time at the library? She couldn’t abandon the library. It needed her. Actually, she needed it.

She suddenly wished to be left alone.

No such luck. Miss Karcher returned with Linda. Now what?

Linda smiled warmly and said, “We’re not ganging up on you, kiddo. Miss Karcher and I have talked. This is chance for you to fulfill your dream.”

“What dream?”

Linda rolled her eyes. “Aren’t you the princess who wished she could be useful? Doing more? Now you can.”

“I love the library. I could never leave it.”

Linda turned to face Miss Karcher. “Most people beg for jobs. We have to beat this kid over the head.”

Before Lila could respond, Miss Karcher said, “It’s nearly December. This is what I’m offering, Lila. I’d need you Monday through Friday from eight-thirty until eleven forty-five starting the middle of January, the start of second semester. What I would wish is that you come in to observe the kids in the school setting and our weekly routine say . . . after Christmas vacation.”

“Not all day?”

“No, in the afternoons I teach music to all grades, if you can believe that. Now, your salary is something we’ll have to discuss with Mr. Knight. You’d be classified as support staff, but with you bachelor’s degree, I think . . .”

Lila tuned out as her head felt ready to burst. Spoken words swam around and around in her brain. Schools were noisy and full of people, especially elementary schools.

“And, if your stamina lasts, kiddo, I still want you here at the library. What do think?”

When Lila failed to respond, Miss Karcher cleared her throat and said, “It’s Monday. Do you think you’ll have an answer by Wednesday? Oh, and two more things. Since I’ll be getting more kids, I’m thinking of taking a few classes this summer at the community college. It’ll make me feel better. You could, too. The other thing. It’s time for you to call me Jan.”

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**By the end of April, Lila had survived a dose of reality. Any fairy tale she harbored about curing the ills of all little children were challenged and dispelled.**

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Hands flew around the dinner table as the three Gentry’s silently discussed the day’s events. Finally, her mother signed, “We’re so proud of you, Lila. Whatever you decide has to be right for you. Maybe, if you take the job, you’ll want to use some of my books.”

Mr. Gentry laughed aloud. He signed, “Maggie. No bribing. Let the child make up her own mind.”

“That’s just it,” Lila said as she signed. “It’s about time I grew up and faced reality. I’m not a child. What am I waiting for? I could at least try.”

By the end of April, Lila had survived a dose of reality. Any fairy tale she harbored about curing the ills of all little children were challenged and dispelled. She learned to accept the small steps of progress many of the children, including Ricky, were making.

“Remember, Lila, we have them for only three hours, five days a week,” Jan cautioned whenever Lila became discouraged. “And Ricky’s dad is still insisting he be promoted to kindergarten. Get ready for the individual staffing coming up in May.”

Lila knew each child would receive a multi-disciplined staffing attended by the teaching team and the parents. She

vowed to sit on her hands in case she became upset or too nervous. Jan had assured her that she wouldn't necessarily have to speak unless someone asked her a specific question.

"Your reticence is refreshing, Lila, after all the gabbing I'm bombarded with in the teachers' lounge. I appreciate your tacit responses and innate intelligence."

On May 20, Lila regretted she would miss her afternoon at the library. She'd promised Linda she would escape as soon as the staffing concluded and stay until nine—closing time. *Let's get this meeting over with*, she thought.

To Lila's dismay, no less than eleven people filed into the conference room. She and Jan sat directly across from the door so they could observe each participant. Delores Hayfield, the special education coordinator for the district, removed files and other papers from her briefcase. She nodded to Jan and Lila and said, "My fourth one today. Do you anticipate any problems?" She glanced at her watch.

"Not really," Jan said and smiled. "I'm ready if you are."

The school principal popped in although his attendance wasn't required. As the seats around the table filled, Lila's heart beat faster. Harry Potter, she thought. I shall go directly upstairs as soon as I arrive at my sanctuary and read a chapter of book seven.

Ricky's parents whispered between themselves. Mrs. Carter seemed to be placating her husband with pleading looks and gestures.

*I can see where Ricky gets his looks*, Lila thought. His mother had shoulder-length brown hair she frequently had to brush from her eyes. Mr. Carter preferred the closely shorn military look. He stared at Lila until she looked down.

As the staffing reports from each professional member of the team were given, Ricky's father challenged many points.

*Uh-oh*, Lila thought. *The troll has arrived and come up from under the bridge.*

As Jan described Ricky's progress and problems in certain areas, Mr. Carter practically leaped from his chair and pointed to Lila. "You're the one. You're the reason he flaps like a bird and says weird stuff. He gets mad and screeches like one, too." As he went on to describe Ricky's behaviors at home, Lila began to understand. Jan jumped in to defend Lila and the classroom strategies agreed upon, but Lila cleared her throat.

"Mr. Carter, young children use their hands early. It's only natural. When signs can be made to have meaning for language-delayed children, their frustration decreases as they are able to communicate. Look, Aristotle said, 'The soul never thinks without pictures.' Think about it. We picture things all the time. You said you worked at Caterpillar. I immediately pictured large yellow tractors. When Ricky signs, he's using his left and right brain functions. That can only be a good thing. Right now gestures are sounds for him. But as he learns words, he will gradually fade out the signing. See, memory is related to language storage and then retrieval. Right now for Ricky and a lot of challenged kids, the retrieval part is the hard part. Anything we can all do to assist them will facilitate memories they can use later."

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## **Lila wanted to reach across the shiny oak table and slap Mr. Carter, if only to knock some sense into him.**

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Mrs. Carter interrupted. "But what is he doing with his fingers? He moves them rapidly and becomes upset when I don't respond the way he wants me to."

Jan smiled. "Ricky is fingerspelling. A lot of our young children do it merely because they haven't matured enough to write. I didn't write until I was five years old."

"I just don't like all that flapping and other stuff. It looks weird. He isn't deaf."

Lila wanted to reach across the shiny oak table and slap Mr. Carter, if only to knock some sense into him. Her parents would be appalled. Instead she sipped water and waited for the blood to stop rushing in her ears.

*Calm down, Cinderella*, she told herself. *These people are still grieving the loss of a "normal" child. They haven't had any more children because they're too busy blaming each other and are scared. Our job is to help them and Ricky.*

"Uh. . ." Mrs. Hayfield attempted to fill the silence that filled the space.

Lila squared her shoulders and said, "Wouldn't you like to communicate with your son? I realize he can be difficult, but Ricky is amazing."

Mrs. Carter sniffed and nodded. "I would. I dream about it."

"I can help you with that," Lila said.

Later, Jan and Lila huddled over coffee in the lounge.

"Well, that went well."

"It did?"

Jan laughed. "I once attended a staffing where a dad put a seven year curse on my head. Seriously, you were amazing. I didn't know you could talk that much. Where did all those words come from?"

"My heart, I guess."

"You were signing the whole time. It was beautiful. And those references and suggestions you gave the Carters. Why did you propose that Mrs. Carter buy the books and ASL manual instead of borrowing them? Afraid *he* might find you in the library?"

Lila shrugged and shook her head. "She might want to highlight something."

Lila lay in bed that night and thought about her verbal torrent at the staffing. She felt exhausted yet also proud. She vowed not to make all that talking a habit, though.

How she would deal with Mr. Carter during the next school year remained to be seen. The district had offered options other than plunking Ricky in a regular first grade classroom where he would undoubtedly be overwhelmed and set up to fail. Mr. Carter opted to leave Ricky in Jan's class with Lila as his one-to-one assistant with gradual inclusion in first grade activities. The little guy would turn five over the summer.

Lila smiled as Jessica Fletcher solved another murder and she switched off the television. Fairy tales were only that but Lila realized her wish to become more useful and find a more fulfilling path in her life just might be actualized. Working two jobs seemed right for a young woman. Maybe this summer she should look for an apartment. ♦

F. I. GOLDHABER

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## LITTLE LAVENDER PILL

The little lavender pill promises relief  
 from years of torment and despair.  
 It will disperse the demons who haunt you,  
 but will it also chase your muse away?  
 You read about the side effects and wonder,  
 do you want to trade the devils you know  
 for the unknown hell of pharmacology?

*Previously published in Spring/Summer  
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 with permission of the author.*

A. Z. LOUISE

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## THISTLE

I have been watching  
     the growth of a thistle  
 In front of a house  
     three doors down

It pushed up  
     from the hard concrete  
 Drinking in  
     the cold Newcastle rain

It's as tall as I am now  
     purple flowers the size of my hand  
 I only walk past it once a week  
     but I smile at it whenever I do

I am pushing myself out of the house  
     through the high, hard wall of panic  
 Maybe by the time the thistle dies  
     I'll feel the touch of the sun  
     as often as it does.

# A CLIMB TO FREEDOM

CRAIG R. GRALLEY

I'm hiking at six thousand feet and stumbled twice on this narrow and rocky trail deep in the French Pyrenees. There's nothing to grab onto if I fall, only thorny brush and an occasional scrub pine cling to the sharp mountain slope. The glaciers of the snow-capped Canigou Massif are to my left; straight ahead, the Pic de la Dona, a rocky cone on the border with Spain, shines in the distance like an icy star.

As a wave of vertigo approaches, I take a deep breath of clean mountain air and begin to think of others who made this climb before: British and American pilots shot down over Nazi-occupied France, Jews facing deportation to death camps, Frenchmen escaping forced labor in Germany. I have found what the French call a *Chemin de la Liberte*—a Freedom Trail of the Second World War, linking France with Spain.

It's been a difficult search. The French—even the locals—have forgotten this Freedom Trail exists. No historic markers or hikers are on this path. Like a dusty jewel buried in an attic trunk, its value and meaning have been lost to time.

But I've come to the Pyrenees not to find *a* trail but *this* very special trail. I believe I've found the path used by America's most accomplished and least known spy of World War II, who fled France on short notice to escape capture, torture, and likely death at the hands of Gestapo Chief Klaus Barbie, the Butcher of Lyon. But what would have been a difficult trek for an experienced hiker was an exceptional feat for this disabled agent, who made the climb to freedom over the jagged Pyrenees with an artificial leg. The name of this remarkable American woman was Virginia Hall.

\* \* \*

Virginia Hall's childhood prepared her well for a life in espionage. The Halls of Baltimore—Edwin, a successful entrepreneur, Barbara, and their children, Virginia and John—loved outdoor adventures on the family farm and holidays in Europe. Young Virginia, a good though not an exceptional student, was class president at Roland Park Country School, editor-in-chief of the school newspaper and captained the hockey team. According to her niece, Lorna Catling, Virginia acted in school pro-

ductions and, "always took the role of the pirate chief."

Beneath her passion for leading was a streak of independence and self-confidence. The yearbook called Virginia, "the most original of our class" and Catling remembered Aunt Virginia as, "comfortable in any situation; nothing daunted her." After high school, Virginia was off to Barnard and Radcliffe but quit after refusing to take classes required for graduation. She continued her studies in Paris and at the Konsular Akademie in Vienna, where she earned a diploma in economics and international law, and became fluent in French, German, and Italian. She understood Russian, too.

The Department of State seemed the perfect career for this self-reliant and adventurous woman. As a clerk in the consular section, Virginia served in a number of European posts but grew restless and having ambition, sought to join the diplomatic corps. But before she could take the required Foreign Service Examination she was wounded

while hunting Gallinago—a marsh bird found on the shore of the Gediz peninsula in Turkey. Virginia lost a portion of her left leg, just below the knee, when gangrene set in.

The State Department had strict rules against disabled employees joining the diplomatic corps and Hall was furious when barred from further Foreign Service testing. Her appeal letter reached then-Secretary of State Cordell Hull but he dismissed it. Implying Virginia should be satisfied with existing career prospects, the Secretary wrote, “Hall could become a fine career girl in the Consular Service.” His decision was final. Her career path was blocked.

On leave from State and back at the family farm in Parkton, Maryland, Virginia learned to walk again using a prosthetic limb she nicknamed Cuthbert. Prosthetic devices in the 1930s were clunky appendages made of painted wood that often didn’t fit properly. Pressure sores were created when the wood chafed the stump’s tender skin. Though hollow, Cuthbert, with an aluminum foot, weighed more than seven pounds. It was attached by leather belts wrapped around Virginia’s waist.

\* \* \*

I arrived in France in search of Virginia’s escape route, armed with three paragraphs from a book written in a language I didn’t understand. My wife translated the brief passage of Vincent Nouzille’s *L’Espionne Virginia Hall une Americaine dans la Guerre* that told of Hall’s arduous twenty-three-mile journey across the Pyrenees. It said that Hall passed through the German’s “forbidden zone” by car to Villefranche-de-Conflent on November 12, 1942, and started her walk into the mountains. She, along with two other companions and a guide, followed the river Rotja up to the mountain pass at Col de Mantet—down a valley and over another pass near Pic de la Dona,

down again to the Spanish towns Setcases and Compradon, and finally to the village of San Juan de las Abesdas, where she was to pick up the train bound for Barcelona.

I thought a visit to France’s museum dedicated to Freedom Trails, the Chemin de la Liberte Musee in Saint Girons, in the foothills of the Pyrenees not far from Toulouse, would be the right place to start my search and began by showing the curator the paragraphs from Nouzille’s book. My enthusiasm crumbled quickly when the custodian of the two-room museum, where my wife and I were the only visitors, asked to make a copy of my thin record. She was not aware of Hall or Nouzille and had no knowledge of a freedom trail starting in Villefranche-de-Conflent. The museum’s exhibits displayed maps of trails beginning in Toulouse that crossed the central Pyrenees. I looked at the trails highlighted in red and blue, and decided that Virginia probably avoided these main routes to skirt German patrols and bypass the highest mountain passes. Coming up dry in Saint Girons, my only option was to go to Villefranche-de-Conflent to conduct my own search for Virginia Hall’s trail.

\* \* \*

Virginia resigned from the State Department and to find adventure and new meaning in her life, traveled to Paris on the eve of the Nazi invasion of France. She saw the war up close as a driver in the French Ambulance Service, but after the Germans rolled through Paris in June 1940 she retreated to London. A vacancy opened at the US War Department and she accepted a position as a code clerk.

The United States was not yet in the war but Virginia’s knowledge of the French countryside, fluency in French and German, and her moxie caught the attention of the British. Prime Minister Winston Churchill had just established the Special Operations Executive “to set Europe ablaze” by supporting underground resistance movements and

conducting sabotage operations. But for all of its bravado, the new SOE had little real grasp of the European theater. It was using Michelin guides to cover the French war zone.

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## **The State Department had strict rules against disabled employees joining the diplomatic corps and Hall was furious when barred from further Foreign Service testing.**

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The SOE recruited Virginia Hall as its first resident agent emplaced behind German lines in France. Using forged documents, false names, and working undercover as a reporter for the New York Post, Hall established a headquarters in the Haute Loire near Lyon in August 1941. Her mission, code-named Geologist-5, was to provide SOE with information on Vichy France: political developments, economic conditions, and the popular will to resist.

Virginia proved adept at recruiting spies. One agent, Suzanne Bertillon, a former government censor who Virginia called “my unofficial Vichy correspondent,” established a chain of ninety agents throughout southern France. It provided intelligence on ammunition and petrol depots, German troop movements, industrial production—even a German submarine base under construction in the port of Marseilles, later destroyed by allied bombs. Some of Virginia’s encoded communications were sent via Western Union telegram to her cutout George Backer at the New York Post, who forwarded the information to SOE London.

Virginia also grew her agent network, code-named Heckler, into an important logistical hub. The British were ramping up agent operations; parachuting men and equipment into France for sabotage operations across the country and Heckler, first on the ground, was centrally located. Hall became an expert at support operations—organizing resistance movements, supplying agents with money, weapons, and supplies; helping downed airmen to escape; offering safe houses and medical assistance to wounded agents and pilots. She also developed a specialty: planning and executing jailbreaks. One of her agents, a local doctor named Jean Rousset, established an asylum for the mentally ill just to hide escapees until safe passage could be found from France.

SOE records show nearly every British agent in France at one time or another received support from Heckler. But being the nerve center made Virginia a target. Lyon's Gestapo Chief Klaus Barbie, who never knew Virginia's true name or nationality, caught wind of her activities and was reported to have said, "I have to get my hands on that limping Canadian bitch." He circulated wanted posters and placed a bounty on her head.

It's well-known in the world of espionage that the risk of discovery and capture escalates the longer an agent stays behind the lines. Over thirty percent of SOE agents were killed overseas—many were executed on the spot—others survived brutal torture or were shipped to concentration camps. German military intelligence—the Abwehr—was extremely successful in infiltrating resistance groups and allied sabotage networks. According to historian M. R. D. Foot, by May 1942 no organized British networks were operating in France. Only Heckler remained.

With so many networks rolled up it was difficult to determine which agents were clean. When Virginia heard a French network in Paris, codenamed Gloria, was desperate to send reports and microfilm of German naval facilities to SOE London, she agreed to help. She didn't know the leader of Gloria had been captured, tortured, and would be killed, and his organization was controlled by German military intelligence. The Abwehr sent their agent—a catholic priest-turned informant, Abbé Robert Alesh—to courier tampered microfilm to Heckler's drop at Dr. Rousset's office. Virginia didn't trust the abbé and sensed the coming danger: agent networks were collapsing all around and both the Abwehr and Gestapo were closing in. In September 1942 she sent an urgent message to London: "I may be watched . . . my address has been given up . . . my time is about up."

\* \* \*

The tourist information office was close to the gate of the walled medieval city of Villefranche-de-Conflent. Though I received a blank stare when I asked about nearby trails, one woman's interest was piqued when I told of the Chemin de la Liberte in her town. She spoke with her colleagues and made a phone call. She held more discussions, then more calls. Finally, she hung up the phone and announced that she knew nothing of a freedom trail nearby, but there was one path, an old one, up the road, outside the city of Py that followed the river Rotja into the mountains. "But be warned," she said, "it is very steep."

My pulse quickened when I stopped at a small clearing on the one-lane road outside the walled city and saw a smooth path next to the river Rotja. I walked it a bit before it ended at the road. Is this the trail? I continued on to the small village of Py and there in the center of town I saw a wrinkled map

pressed behind glass and a wooden frame. It showed a single trail leading to the Col de Mantet, skirting the Pic de la Dona then crossing the Spanish border—all were markers in Nouzille's book. Just then I knew I had found the trail.

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**Then I remembered Lorna Catling telling me that Virginia, who was not prone to hyperbole, said crossing the Pyrenees was, "the most frightening part of my life overseas."**

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As I began to walk the path, my thoughts turned to Virginia. How difficult it must have been to hike twenty-three miles over the rugged Pyrenees with her wooden leg, Cuthbert. Then I remembered Lorna Catling telling me that Virginia, who was not prone to hyperbole, said crossing the Pyrenees was, "the most frightening part of my life overseas." And I began to understand. I noticed the topography changing. An overgrown, treed path next to a bold stream began to curve upward. As I began to gain altitude, nearly five thousand feet in the first ten miles, the Rotja got smaller and finally disappeared. The dirt path turned to loose rock and then boulders interrupted the trail. Its sides dropped off steeply and the trees gave way to scrub brush and grass, exposing me to a stiff breeze coming off the snow-covered peaks of the Canigou Massif.

I was fortunate. I was hiking on a beautiful day in May and yet, as I was struggling to catch my breath, I remembered Virginia stayed in the Haute Loire another two months after her September message to London. Changing names

and safe houses frequently to avoid capture—she told London she had one more mission: to aid the escape of two jailed agents code-named Alex and Fabian. But when the Germans flooded the unoccupied zone with troops after their defeat in North Africa in mid-November 1942, Virginia knew the borders would be sealed and more men would be hunting her. She left Lyon with only hours to spare. Her agent, Dr. Rousset, was arrested the day after she left and the rest of Heckler was rolled up soon thereafter.

\* \* \*

In November the lower elevations of the Pyrenees hover around freezing and the mountain passes become covered with snow and ice, making footing treacherous. I imagined Virginia taking the steepest part of the slick trail sideways; putting her full weight on her right leg and using her hip to lever Cuthbert over the rocks. The constant pressure on her stump must have been unbearable. I remembered reading that

Virginia, in a wireless transmission to London, said Cuthbert was causing her problems. The operator, not knowing that Cuthbert was her artificial limb, said, “If Cuthbert gives you trouble, eliminate him.”

Two days later and after negotiating mountain passes over seven thousand five hundred feet in altitude, Virginia arrived in Spain, exhausted. But there she made a mistake, unusual for a seasoned spy. She arrived at the train station at San Juan de las Abesdas hours before the Barcelona train, was spotted and thrown in jail by Spanish authorities for illegal border crossing. Eventually, the US embassy secured her release and though Barbie was still hunting her, Hall was determined to return to France. The British refused her request, calling it a suicide mission, but Hall did return, this time with the American Office of Strategic Services. Back in the Haute Loire, Hall organized several thousand Maquis, blew up

bridges, and conducted other sabotage operations to support the allies’ D-Day invasion.

Virginia Hall left no memoirs, granted no interviews, and spoke little about her overseas life—even with relatives. She was awarded Member of the British Empire and received our country’s Distinguished Service Cross, the only civilian woman in the Second World War to do so. But she refused all ceremonies—even a presentation by President Truman. By this time Virginia had joined the CIA and thought the publicity would blow her cover. And she couldn’t let her career in espionage end that way. She knew she had more mountains yet to climb. ♦

*An earlier version of this article was published in *Studies in Intelligence* (CIA’s scholarly publication). Reprinted with permission of the author.*

# THE ORDERLY

LAURA YEAGER

Coming home from St. Mary's Hospital, where he worked as a third shift orderly in the psychiatric ward, he saw that the holiday lady had outdone herself this Easter. No one was behind him, and he could drive by slowly. He counted nine wooden painted rabbits, eleven chickens and twenty wooden eggs hand placed all over the front yard. These numbers were up from last Easter and even from the last holiday—St. Patrick's Day—when she had nailed thirty shamrocks to the fence and stuck a leprechaun in the grass. On Valentine's Day, twenty-five pink hearts had hung from her rain gutter.

He had worked a double shift yesterday, so when he'd gone in at 2:30, her yard had been bare. The sight of so much pastel color and shape was shocking, and he backed up to take it in again.

He tried to imagine why she could have done this. Once, he'd seen her at the donut shop, discussing how she'd purchased some glow-in-the-dark reflector tape and had stapled it to a pumpkin's eye. Maybe, she thought of herself as an artist.

He'd just worked sixteen hours. It was his task to check on the patients in the psychiatric ward every hour to make sure they hadn't harmed themselves or someone else. The orderly did this by simply opening the door and looking in—night after night, down the halls, hour after hour.

In between times, he'd sit at the desk and chat with the night nurse, or listen to the radio. In the morning, around 6:30, he'd greet the early risers, who often said nothing. He had watched them sleep all night. In many ways, he felt like a father.

\* \* \*

Sleeping in bed with his dog, Brown, he could hear someone knocking. In a dream, he saw himself pushing open a door and looking in at a slumbering body wrapped in a white, cotton blanket, oblivious to his stare.

Someone was knocking on his door. "Who is it?" he said to Brown. The dog lifted his head, jumped off the bed and began to bark.

The only person it could be was Mike, a guy on his bowling league who also worked third shift. He came by sometimes to watch soap operas or to tell him about women. He usually called first. It could also be his mother. He hadn't seen her lately. She usually brought a pizza over and pumped him for information.

When he got to the door, he could see it was neither.

"I'm collecting for Our Perpetual Mystery's soup kitchen," a girl said. She too had gotten into the Easter spirit and was wearing a pink blouse, a lavender raincoat, and blue pants. It was drizzling out, and her mascara was running. She looked poor, like a patron of the soup kitchen. Holding the

can, expecting something from him, she looked pretty. She seemed about twenty-five—five years younger than him.

“Hold on,” he said, shivering in his bare feet. He wore no shirt, just a pair of jeans. In the kitchen, while Brown stared at him, he fished six bucks, all he had, out of his shirt pocket. When he returned to the door, the girl was still there. He put the money into her can.

“Thanks. We serve dinner every night at 5:00 if you know of anyone who needs it.”

“Who are you?” he asked.

“The cook.”

The girl walked on, going from house to house, looking into people’s private places, as he did every night in the psych ward. She seemed unaffected by the potential danger in this. Anything could happen as she stood at people’s thresholds, he knew. She must be a veteran money collector, he thought. He remembered back to when he first began opening patients’ doors in the middle of the night. He expected them to be hiding in the doorway, ready to jump him. And then he got used to it. No one had ever tried to tackle him, although some had been awake instead of asleep. One man had been meditating in a lotus position in the middle of the bed.

\* \* \*

“I need these in a size ten,” he said to the athletic shoe clerk. He handed the man a colorful shoe, which cost \$63.00. His old ones, the identical pair, were shot. He walked five miles a night through the halls on the ward. He’d clocked it once.

“Here’s the tens,” said the clerk, pulling the shoes out of the box.

The orderly let the clerk lace both shoes up.

“You go through these quick.”

“I walk all night.”

“Oh,” the clerk said.

“I’m an orderly on a psych ward.”

“Oh.” The clerk seemed nervous. “How do these fit?”

“These are the only shoes on the market I wear.”

“I’m glad we stock them.”

The orderly stared at the cardboard Easter Bunny the store had taped to the register.

\* \* \*

At work, he followed a patient as she went into the utility room, where a metal mirror hung. With a cotton ball, she swabbed her cheeks, one side and then the other. He watched how she tried to bring her face into focus, but he could tell it was impossible. According to her chart, the doctor had only that day reduced her medication.

He knew she would never break the glass bottle and use a shard to cut herself; he could sense it. Her illness wasn’t that deep, but he as well as she had to follow rules—no glass in the rooms. He kept glass bottles in a locker by his desk.

“That’s a lovely shirt,” she said, handing him the bottle, so he could put it back.

“Thanks.”

“Yellow is my favorite color.” The girl stared at his pale yellow shirt. She was fascinated by color, a trait of many manic depressives, who reported seeing beautiful colors in the thin air.

\* \* \*

“What are these for?” the orderly asked the nurse, holding up the package of colored pens even before he took off his coat. For years, this nurse had been trying to get him to take up drawing and painting after he’d seen one of his sketches on a placemat at a restaurant.

“I bought them today at the grocery store,” the nurse said. “They’re for you.”

The nurse could be very pushy when it came to art.

The orderly went to make his first round. At room 101, both patients were up. One was ripping out all the perfumed advertisements in a stack of magazines. The other was trying them all on.

In 102, he saw the familiar pie-shaped wedge of light cut the shadow on the floor. These patients were sound asleep already, in pitch blackness. Neither of them moved.

103 was the same as 102.

In 104, he found a patient crying. “Are you OK?” he asked.

“Yes.”

When he got to 105, he woke both patients up. “Sorry,” the orderly said.

This investigation continued for fifteen more rooms. In 201, a patient had started a fire in one of the trash cans and was sitting around it as if it were a small campfire in a deep woods. The orderly quickly doused the fire with the water from the patient’s water pitcher. The doctors would probably send this one to Fallsview, a state institution.

The patient went into the white room without a fuss. “I just wanted to be alone in the forest,” he said.

When the orderly got back to the station at 11:15, he began to mark the chart like he always did—a check mark for each patient who seemed to be resting calmly and an X for those who were not, but this time he used the nurse’s gift of the colored pens. For this hour, 11:00, everyone except the man who had lit the fire got a check mark, including the man who was weeping. Even the psychiatrists considered private crying normal, yet if it went on all night, he’d have to give the patient Xs. He made the check marks neatly in purple and the Xs in orange.

“Pretty,” said the nurse, eyeing the row of colorful symbols.

At 12:00 after the rounds, everyone received a green check mark.

By 1:00, everyone was dead asleep. Each room had its own key signature of snoring. In 206, he could see a light under the patient’s blankets—a flashlight. He didn’t disturb this person, although he probably should have. He had read with a flashlight in bed as a child. No one had disturbed him.

Someone in 207 was on the john, and someone in 210 sat in a chair, knitting a multi-colored afghan. It was the woman who loved yellow. She did not seem to be bothering her roommate.

For the 1:00 hour, he gave everyone pink check marks.

Looking at the colorful charts, the nurse said, “That’s an improvement.”

It was 4:00. In room 211, as he peered through the dark, he could see the blankets moving. The patient, Carolyn, seemed to have gained at least fifty pounds. Then, he realized someone was in bed with her. This had never happened before at 4:00.

Someone moaned. He decided to shut the door until he could hear the bed stop creaking. At least they’d get something good out of the trouble they were going to be in. Sex between the patients was forbidden.

When he guessed they were finished, he went into the room. “I’m sorry, but you’re going to have to go back to your bed,” he said to the boy, who was in to have his medicine adjusted. He had schizophrenia. The girl had attempted suicide a few days earlier.

“Are you going to report us?” the boy asked.

“Yes.”

“That was the best thing that’s happened to me in a long time,” the girl said.

“If it happens again inside, your doctors will probably send you to Fallsview.”

In response, she mooned him.

In a week, the charts looked beautiful.

“When are you going to start painting?” the nurse asked.

\* \* \*

The day after Easter, he happened to be driving by and witnessed the holiday lady removing an egg from her yard. He felt close to this lady, although he’d never met her, yet he couldn’t stop the car and say, “Your colors have changed the way I do bookkeeping.”

He drove on, not having to go in that night. Spending so much time with very sad people (he didn’t think of them as sick, just very sad), he decided he needed to be with a large group of happy people. He ruled out the mall.

\* \* \*

The soup kitchen was filled to capacity—seventy-five. Everyone seemed to be at home in this linoleum-tiled church basement. Families sat together, waiting for the food to be served. Solitary people sat with their friends. This basement still had reminders of Easter—crosses, lambs, purple sashes—on the walls.

The only person he knew was in the kitchen, so he pushed open the door and went in.

“Hi,” he said.

“Hi. You’ve got a big collie dog, don’t you?”

“Yes.” She remembered Brown.

“Did you come to eat?”

He shook his head, thinking that if he ever painted her he’d paint her nude in front of a green background. She had a trusting face. He did not know her name. He didn’t ask.

Sitting at a table with a skinny, old man, he ate a bowl of chili. These people weren’t noticeably happy or sad, only grateful. The only difference he could see between this group and the group at dinnertime on the ward was that these normal people moved a tiny bit faster; they were not on drugs.

The woman’s name, he learned from one of the priests, was Debra. At home, he drew her face from memory.

By the Fourth of July and the holiday lady’s display of the 200 abstract wooden flags, he was sketching a picture an hour—to “mark” the hour, he said. The nurse was overjoyed. Convinced he could sell the pastels in the gift shop, he framed them himself. The series of cars went in a flash. The orderly’s more abstract triangle sequences also sold. And his portraits didn’t sit in the shop overnight. Oddly enough, the orderly did not make the connection between over-productivity, sleeplessness, and mania.

The orderly noticed that family and friends had brought the patients his pictures because he began to see them in the rooms late at night. With the way they were selling, and the way he was producing them, he believed that he might be able to quit his job, but he liked his job, which was, essentially, peering at people as they slept. He wanted to paint them in their sleep, to capture their inertia, but he feared he’d be fired. Once he stood at a patient’s door and quickly sketched her face.

\* \* \*

“Marge has opened up a doll shop in Stow, and she wants to sell some of your paintings,” his mother said as she bit into a piece of pizza.

“I’d be honored.” Marge was his mother’s best friend.

“You dating?” she asked.

That was one of her questions. She wanted grandchildren. He decided to lie. “I’m seeing a woman named Debra.”

“What’s she do?”

“She works for a church.”

“A nun?”

“She’s a cook.”

“Nice.”

“She cooks at a soup kitchen.”

“I’d like to meet her.”

“I’ll bring her over.” He noticed that she was wearing the small brooch he had made her—a tiny metal picture frame on a pin with a painted violet inside.

“How did you meet her?”

“She came to the door collecting for charity.”

“That’s a nice girl. Your great uncle Lou painted; did you know that?”

“No.”

“Watercolors. You have the gene. I’d love to see you get out of there.”

“Where?”

“The hospital. Open a studio.”

\* \* \*

In August, his vacation came up. He planned to stay in town and draw the whole two weeks. The days were scorching; nothing adorned the holiday lady’s yard except an arching sprinkler.

Late in the evenings, he’d take walks to cool off. From the sidewalk, he could see people in their living rooms watching TV or cleaning up or talking. He studied decors and wall hangings, color schemes. He was amazed at how many people left their curtains open. He wandered into people’s yards to get a closer look.

In 2049 Landon Lane, a mother was yelling at her children to “clean up the place.” He could see that there were board games, as well as shoes and sleeping bags, all over the floor.

In 2051, an older lady was vacuuming, while an older man tried to watch television.

The next house was dark. His shoes became soggy from the wet grass.

In the next few houses, people were reading the paper.

In 2067, a young girl modeled a formal dress, while another girl practiced a dance routine. As he looked into people’s houses, he felt almost that he was doing a service to the neighborhood.

Then, he found himself in front of a couple’s window. He stood behind a large, pungent-smelling shrub and gasped when he saw them. They sat around a clothes basket, folding socks. By the time he realized what he was doing, the woman had already screamed. He didn’t run. He stood there and took the husband’s punch.

He was arrested for trespassing.

Not wanting anyone in his immediate circle to know, he called the church and asked for Debra, who posted bail for him because she said she always returned a favor, and because she thought he was “cute.”

“Why did you look into their windows?” she asked.

“I thought I was at work.”

He painted Debra, in the nude, in front of the green background.

“You know that bail money was just a loan,” she said, adjusting her hip, lying on a table he’d set up.

“I know. I’ll pay you back. You comfortable?”

“I’m fine.”

“You’re not afraid of me, are you?”

“If I were afraid of you would I be lying here naked?”

He wanted to tell her that he was afraid. He’d never done anything like that before. He’d never been arrested.

But he didn’t want to spoil it. She looked so beautiful lying there. She didn’t protest when he switched from painting her image to brushing the paint on her body. Her breasts became hills of small wild flowers. Her nipples he left unpainted. With each stroke of the brush, she made a little noise. When they finally made love, both of them had paint all over the place.

“I can’t sleep,” he confessed.

\* \* \*

At 3:00, when he was sure everyone in the whole hospital was asleep, he set up his stool in the door of 101 and proceeded to sketch the patients. The one in the first bed slept with her mouth open. He could hear the gush of air pour out of her. She was about forty-five, with blond hair and a mark on each side of her nose where her glasses sat. She was a picky patient and had asked for extra blankets and pillows, which surrounded her.

Her roommate had graying hair and a loud snore. He could see traces of lipstick on her lips.

In 102, a huge man slept so soundly he appeared to be dead. He had received numerous shock treatments and walked around the ward in the morning exhausted. He had a square face and blond hair. His roommate was the only black patient—a clean cut looking boy of eighteen.

“What are you doing?” asked a doctor, standing at the doorway of 103, where the lady who loved yellow slept.

“In ‘Mary Had a Little Lamb,’ the lamb signifies Jesus,” the orderly said.

“Are you on something? Did you drink before you came in?”

“I’m fine. Did you know we have a ninety-eight percent DNA match with monkeys? I read it in a magazine.”

“Hello?” said the patient, now awake and squinting in the dark. Seeing the sketchpad, she said, “That’s against the rules.”

“We know,” the doctor said. “Come on; let’s go.”

“I’m sketching them.”

“Yes, and you should be checking in on them to see if they’re sleeping.”

"I think he's crazy," the lady who loved yellow said from beneath the colorful afghan.

\* \* \*

"Place of employment?" the admitting clerk said.

"Here."

"Here?"

"Yes. St. Mary's Hospital."

"Department?"

"Psychiatric."

"Title?"

"Orderly."

\* \* \*

Debra sat on one side of the room, and his mother sat on the other.

"The bishop said we can expand the soup kitchen," Debra said.

"Don't worry," his mother said. "Van Gogh had this, too. Van Gogh had manic depression, you know."

"He's seen to it that we can be open on Saturdays, as well as Tuesdays."

"Maybe this is the best thing. Maybe now, you can open up a studio," his mother said.

"I have jet lag. Day is the middle of the night," the orderly said.

"We'll go," Debra said. "You need your rest."

In his sleep, he wondered if Van Gogh could still hear after he had cut off his own ear. He knew the ear canal and the hammer, anvil, and stirrup would still be there, as well as the eardrum. All that would be missing was the cup-like structure known as the ear—the receiver bowl, a satellite dish. In a dream, he looked closely at Van Gogh's sunflowers, clouds, and pool tables, noticing the match-like brush strokes, and for a minute, he became Van Gogh and every

other great manic depressive who had ever lived.

He jolted awake in a cold sweat when his replacement peered in at him.

"Sorry," the replacement said.

"You woke me up," the orderly said.

He was fascinated by the disappearing light, as the large door slowly closed itself.

\* \* \*

The next day, the orderly had guests. They met him in the day room.

"I brought someone to visit you," Debra said.

"Who?"

"The holiday lady."

"I'm a great fan of your work," the holiday lady said.

"Thank you."

She handed him a plant. "I saw your paintings at Marge Croley's store in Stow."

"What is your real name?" the orderly asked.

"Susan Dickson, and yours?"

"Bob Bennett."

"I've known Debra a long time. We used to sing in the church choir together," Susan said.

"I love your holiday displays," he said.

"Debra told me."

"Why do you do them?"

Around them, patients helped themselves to the olive and pickle tray in the refrigerator a few feet away. Some ate pudding from disposable, plastic containers. They seated themselves at nearby tables, ate their snacks, and pretended not to listen to the visitation.

"I started decorating after Dad died. He had a thing for

holidays. He said they separated us from darkness. He decorated every holiday. Well, holidays do that, don't they?"

"Yes, they do," the orderly said. "Separate us from darkness."

"I think they do," said a patient on the other side of the room.

"So do I," said another.

In the presence of his hero, the orderly was relatively calm. He tried to block out his environment and pretend they were in a private home, his home. He wanted to tell the holiday lady he'd learned new things about darkness, about being the patient, instead of the orderly.

"I hate it here," he said.

"I don't blame you," said Susan.

"I can't leave."

"Must be awful."

That was as far as the orderly could go. As much as he admired Susan Dickson, he hardly knew her. He'd have to save details of pure darkness, the darkness of manic depression, for next time, or maybe for the time after that. The orderly was now able to control his impulses. He knew the meds were starting to work. He knew the party was over.

Debra said, "Doesn't he look good?"

Susan said, "He sure does."

A patient wearing hot pink lipstick that looked like it had been applied by a small child thought they were talking about her. She said, "Thank you."

The orderly said, "You're welcome." ♦

# UNBALANCED

SHEILA LUNA

He went to the doctor on Friday with a stomachache. Saturday he was on life support. Sunday he was dead. It was Super Bowl Sunday. He had money on the game—a five dollar bet with his buddy. It was their annual ritual, like blowing out candles on a cake. He always lost. That year he won, but he never got to collect.

We stood by his grave. Our tears would fall later and unexpectedly—when we drove past his favorite rib place or when we found his poems. But just then he seemed so close, only a few feet away. I didn't want to leave him.

"Fifty years," my mother had repeated several times. "In three days, we would have been married fifty years." Grief choked her.

"We'll give you the fifty," I said.

I took her home. The house smelled like my father. His raggedy shoes sat by the door. I had wanted to buy him new shoes. I used to tell him to get new shoes and he'd always say, "I got shoes."

She stopped when she saw his shoes.

I stood in her kitchen. The kitchen where she cooked for my father. The kitchen where we colored eggs, stuffed turkeys, and spilled guts. The kitchen of my childhood. My parents had painted the walls with a sponge. It was a place of laughter and comfort—this kitchen. I brought her a peanut

butter sandwich and milk, but she was already asleep in my father's recliner. I hoped she was with him.

I remember her once commenting how lucky she was to have her health. I felt lucky I still had my mother.

Three weeks after we buried my father, she fell and broke her hip. In her kitchen. "It's the body's way of grieving," a nurse had told me. "Losing a spouse disorients the equilibrium."

My mother recovered, but would fall again, breaking each foot on separate occasions.

Over the next two years, my mother would become increasingly confused. I blamed grief. Once she got lost while driving to church. When she hired someone to chop down the forty-year-old eucalyptus tree in her backyard for no reason, I took her to the doctor.

I grew up with that tree. I miss it terribly.

I remember the doctor asking my mother who was the president. I had to leave the room so the nurse could perform tests. "She probably just needs an antidepressant," I said. "It's grief." The doctor said that could be.

I nearly fell over when the doctor gave me a pamphlet on Alzheimer's disease. "Educate yourself," she said. "There are drugs, but things will worsen with time." I placed my shaking hands on the counter for support.

My mother didn't want to move out of her house. "There are lots of activities at the new place," I would tell her. "And, you won't be alone." Who was I kidding? I knew it was difficult for her to leave our house with the sponge-painted kitchen walls and my father's raggedy shoes beside the door. I didn't want to leave it either.

We packed dishes and vases and memories in boxes. I remember finding a charcoal drawing of my father that I had done years ago after he returned from a Colorado River rafting trip. Through the varied shades of gray, I could almost hear him telling stories about *the river, and the Navy, and did you hear the one about . . . ?* He used to sit in his recliner and sing Neil Diamond songs. We would sing "Holly Holy" together.

I would frame the drawing and hang it in my mother's new apartment.

"Who is that again?" she asks whenever she looks at the picture.

"That's Daddy," I say each time.

The disease would eventually steal my mother's memories, one by one, like a vacuum sucking Cheerios from underneath a sofa.

I wasn't able to say good-bye to my father. I wasn't able to tell him how much I loved him or sing "Holly Holy" with him one last time. I have been saying good-bye to my mother a little bit every day—holding on so I don't fall. ♦

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F. I. GOLDHABER

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## AGE OLD DILEMMA

I watch him shuffle along, hunched over  
the aluminum frame that prevents falls.  
His labored breathing and his twisted spine  
slow his steps, trying his escort's patience.

I know I never want to live this way,  
but, I'm too selfish to forgo his wit.  
I won't let go as long as medical  
science can keep him alive and walking.

I have no children to watch over me  
when I reach his age, to make sure I eat,  
drive me to doctors. But that also means  
I've no one who'll need me to cling to life.

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# THE ART OF GENEROSITY

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SANDY PALMER



Jeff Hanson, *Weekend in Old Windsor*, 2019, acrylic on heavily-textured canvas, 46" x 28"

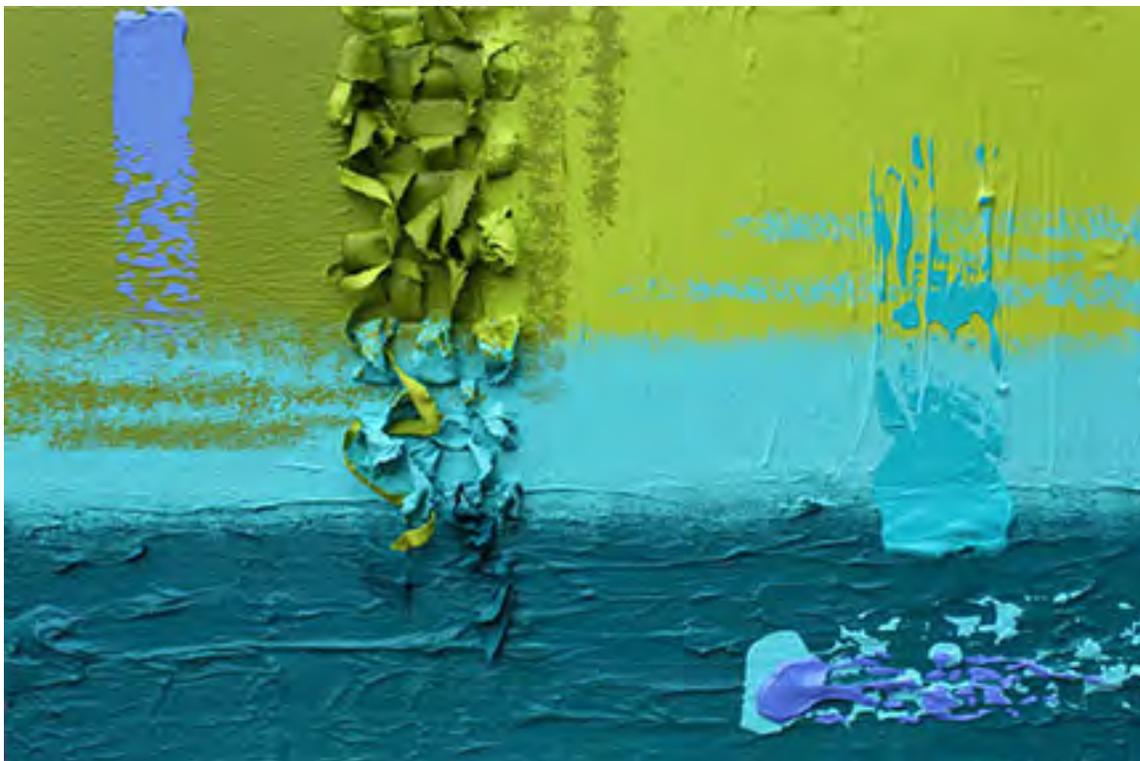
*“Every act of kindness helps create kinder communities, more compassionate nations, and a better world for all . . . even one painting at a time.”*

~Jeff Hanson

**T**welve-year-old Jeff Hanson walked into the Kansas City Cancer Center, wearing a tuxedo and a black top hat for his final radiation treatment to destroy his arch-enemy, CLOD, the tumor in his head. The

name he chose seemed appropriate. CLOD. A dopey, no-good bum he could poke fun at and defeat. Not something to fear. Humor instead of dread. As a result, Hanson will always be known as “the kid in the tuxedo” to those who were there for his treatment that day. A photo was taken of the sixth grader lying flat on the treatment table, face and head covered with an ominous radiation target mask while wearing a tuxedo. It’s a disconcerting image, resembling someone in a mortuary being prepared

for a coffin. Somewhat fitting because there *was* a death that day. It was the end of the villainous optic glioma that was stealing his sight (20/400). As a surprise, Mom organized a “Good-bye CLOD” balloon launch at their home. While he received his last beams of radiation, friends, neighbors and family members gathered at their home to herald their return from the center and say farewell to his “little nemesis.” Thrilled with the fanfare and overwhelming support, in his top hat and tuxedo, he



Jeff Hanson, *Tuesday in Tulum*, 2013, acrylic on heavily-textured and woven canvas, 42" x 28"

released a purple balloon into the air, along with the other ninety-nine balloons, and everyone bid farewell to CLOD. Good riddance!

Hanson is twenty-five now. He's an award-winning artist with a penchant for generosity who gave one million dollars to charity before his twentieth birthday. Who does that?! His paintings are bold and beautiful: Vibrant colors. High contrast. Rich texture. You want to reach out and touch them. And, you can. Unlike most works that hang in museums and galleries, the artist encourages people to touch his paintings and feel the texture, ridges, and grooves of each piece. Fine detail? You won't find any in these images. No muted, beige tones, either. They make him sad. He describes it as "happy art" with bright, cheerful colors. How did he go from being the kid with a brain tumor to an award-winning, widely-recognized artist? It's a remarkable story.

Hal and Julie Hanson's dreams for their son were derailed when he was diagnosed with neurofibromatosis at the age of six. The condition is associated with café au lait spots, learning disabilities, developmental delays, short stature, ADHD, hearing loss, and vision loss. He also had a pea-sized tumor where his optic nerves cross, an optic glioma. During the next few years it became apparent he couldn't do things other kids were doing. His balance was impaired, so activities like riding a bike and skating were nearly impossible. His vision deteriorated. Reading, watching television, playing video games, and doing schoolwork became increasingly difficult. In the fall of 2005, he underwent chemotherapy, and when that didn't work, radiation. The treatment caused swelling, which resulted in more vision loss, so he transferred to the Kansas State School for the Blind where his dad says, "Jeff adapted amazingly well."

*Lessons from CLOD* is a poignant account Hal Hanson wrote about his son's journey, the impact it's had on their family, and the lessons they've learned. It is definitely a book worth reading. A fundamental message is repeated throughout the pages: "We all face challenges. It is not the challenge, but rather your response to the challenge that defines you."

While going through chemotherapy and radiation treatments, the preteen responded by painting simple water-color designs on note cards as a way to pass the time—never complaining or feeling sorry for himself. Julie began sending the cards to people with handwritten notes. Legally blind at the time, Hanson's face was inches away from the cards as he painted, and the designs were all abstracts, but people loved them. It gave him joy to create them, and he was encouraged by friends and family members who wanted to buy them. He began selling his "Visions"



Jeff Hanson, *Barcelona Cathedral*, 2016, acrylic on heavily-textured canvas, 34" x 34"



Jeff Hanson, *Good Morning Maui*, 2019, acrylic on heavily-textured canvas, 34" x 34"

note cards; money raised from the sale of the cards went to the Children's Tumor Foundation.

When he started chemotherapy, Hanson's parents began remodeling a guest room into a contemporary bedroom for him and painted it with bold red, black, and white colors—high contrast helps him distinguish things more easily. During the renovation Hanson found the perfect chair for his room—a black leather Italian Natuzzi recliner that cost \$1,319. That extravagant chair did not fit into the family's budget, so Hanson decided he'd have to buy it himself. After parting ways with CLOD and celebrating the end of treatment, Hanson decided to elevate the concept of a lemonade stand. He painted note cards and packaged them, Mom made

delicious baked goods and beverages, and the twelve-year-old entrepreneur launched Jeff's Bistro in the family's front yard, near the curb. Proceeds from his note cards would continue to go to the Children's Tumor Foundation, and the rest would go toward that Italian Natuzzi chair for his room. He decided to paint more cards and share his story with patrons while sitting under a brightly-colored umbrella selling his wares. On the first day he made \$77. Not bad. He promptly went to the furniture store and put down a deposit for the chair.

With Mom's help marketing her son's business venture, word of Jeff's Bistro spread quickly, and with each passing day he was closer to his goal. His dad suspected people might be supporting

the Bistro out of pity for the blind kid who had just gone through chemotherapy and radiation, but he applauded his son's work ethic and determination. On day four, a neighbor made a purchase at the Bistro in the morning and was so moved by the young man's story and his mission that he showed up later that day—and delivered the black Italian Natuzzi chair. The generous buyer gave the money that had been put down as a deposit back to the young entrepreneur. The puzzled preteen was stunned and asked if he should reimburse him once he raised the full amount. No. It was a gift.

The kind neighbor asked Hanson to continue with the Bistro, then take what was raised at the end of the summer and pay it forward. Hanson agreed



Jeff Hanson, *Fizz at the Wynn*, 2018, acrylic on heavily-textured canvas with high gloss finish, 21" x 50"



During the trip to Dubai, at 14 years of age, Jeff presented Elton John with *View from the 22nd Row*, depicting his abstract, low vision view of the stage while the singer performed.

and decided to give all the proceeds to the Children's Tumor Foundation. The Hansons didn't want their son to be defined by his illness, and this spontaneous act of exceptional kindness prompted them to decide they wanted to be a family defined by *generosity*. With the end of summer came the end of Jeff's Bistro. They packed up the table and brightly-colored umbrella and stored them away. It had been an unbelievable summer, and they proudly donated \$15,000 to the Children's Tumor Foundation. Unbelievable, right?

The following year, his ophthalmologist asked if he would replicate one of his cards onto a large canvas and donate it to a charity auction. Although Hanson had never created anything that large before, he agreed, and did a

pretty good job. So good, in fact, it sold for \$400 in a silent auction benefiting Medical Missions.

While undergoing radiation, Make-A-Wish® granted Hanson a wish. After much deliberation, he chose to meet Sir Elton John. After all, if you are able to wish for anything, you might as well go big! Months passed. Unable to arrange the request, Make-A-Wish® asked him to choose something else. Twice. No and no. There was nothing else he wanted. "I am most inspired by people who use their gifts to give back to the world. I chose Sir Elton John because he exemplifies this philanthropic spirit."

Hanson's chemo and radiation treatments ended, his hair grew back, and he'd found a way to pay it forward (as the generous donor of the black leather chair had requested). He continued to donate his Visions cards and canvas paintings to charitable auctions and even donated some of the proceeds from the canvases he sold. The family had nearly forgotten all about the wish when they were notified that a meeting with Sir Elton John was finally arranged. Hanson and his parents met the flamboyant, multi-Grammy-winning superstar in October of 2007, before he went on stage to perform. They had a wonderful visit, and the thirteen-year-old boy told him all about his art and his charitable giving. Elton said, "If you give to the world, the world will give back."



Jeff Hanson, *When in Tuscany*, 2017, acrylic on heavily-textured canvas, 22" x 28"



Close-up image of heavily-textured poppies from *When in Tuscany*

With that, Hanson reached in his pocket and presented Elton with a \$1,000 check for The Elton John AIDS Foundation. The Make-A-Wish® kid was paying it forward. Two days later, the Children's Tumor Foundation received a \$5,000 donation from Sir Elton John in Hanson's honor.

*If you give to the world, the world will give back.*

As if meeting the legendary singer/songwriter wasn't enough, he also flew the family to Dubai so he could spend more time with them. "Now that was a trip of a lifetime," says Hanson. "While there, I surprised Elton with a painting titled *View from the 22nd Row*. I have done works that I like better . . . I was just a young artist at the time, but this painting has such a great story—and it was for Elton John! He later told me

that the painting is in his home office." Other trips followed the one to Dubai, including a visit to his home in Old Windsor, England.

Years later, the Make-A-Wish® recipient would become the "star" another Make-A-Wish® kid wanted to meet. And, of course, he granted the wish by spending the day going to art museums and shopping for art supplies with her.

At fifteen years of age, Hanson grossed \$35,000 in earnings from his note cards and acrylic paintings. When he was nineteen, he was featured in *People* for his philanthropy, after meeting his goal to give \$1 million to charity before his twentieth birthday. Then came Omaha Fashion Week where models wore hand-painted gowns with Hanson's artwork. It was then that he began hand-painting his own bow ties and

cummerbunds for galas. He's a colorful guy with a wardrobe (complete with matching eyeglasses in every conceivable color and shape) that makes a statement, just like his art.

"My signature artwork style is heavily-textured canvas painted with a unique combination of bold colors." Some of his tools might be found at a home renovation project—putty knives, scrapers, tile trowels—and he often paints above the canvas, like Jackson Pollock. Ten to fifteen paintings cover the studio floor in various stages of completion. He begins by adding texture to the canvas, an essential element for the artist who has low vision. The thick sculpture material takes about two weeks to dry, and then multiple layers of acrylic paint are applied until the artist decides he's added the last detail. Some of the more contemporary pieces are finished with



Jeff Hanson Art Hand-Painted Gown Collection, each one is a one-of-a-kind work of art  
Photo Credit: Gary Rohman Photography

a high gloss varnish. It is a labor-intensive process, and it takes approximately eight weeks to complete one painting.

Much of this work is inspired by his travels. Hanson enjoys capturing his surroundings with photos and then creating paintings of what he's seen in places he's visited all over the world. In addition to photography and traveling, he enjoys playing golf. "It may seem strange that someone who is visually impaired enjoys a sport with such a small ball, but I like the challenge."

The young man who hand-paints his own colorful attire for elegant black tie events where his paintings raise thousands for charities also loves to dip his French fries in applesauce. To see him, and some of his work, it doesn't take long to recognize his passion for

purple—he loves the color that is associated with royalty, ambition, creativity, and magic, among other things. His story is mingled with elements that are magical and unbelievable, so purple seems appropriate.

Demand for Hanson's work is so great, his father has left his position as director and physician of an emergency department to work full time with the family art business, along with Mom and manager Julie who says, "Jeff is so lucky to have a wildly successful art business. Since there are only three of us, we wear lots of hats."

Earlier this year the family moved into a stunning contemporary home in Overland Park, Kansas. Hanson says, "The unique property has space for my apartment as well as the Jeff Hanson

Art Gallery and Studio." In celebration of the new gallery/studio, his twenty-fifth birthday, and a new philanthropic goal, a grand opening celebration was held in September 2018 with hundreds of people in attendance.

"When my brain tumor was discovered at age six, my parents were told I would be blind by age thirty. My vision is stable today at 20/70 . . . I am not defined as the young man down the street with a brain tumor, but rather the visually impaired young man from Kansas who has generated over \$4.6 million dollars for charity, with a new goal to raise ten million for charity by age thirty!" He has already helped 243 charities across the country, including Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation, the American Heart Association, Chicago Lighthouse, and Ronald McDonald House Charities.

*CBS Sunday Morning* featured Hanson a few years ago, and the video profile can be seen on his website

**JeffHansonArt.com**. In 2012 he was recognized as Young Entrepreneur of the Year and Young Philanthropist of the Year in his region. In 2015, he was the winner of The NASCAR Foundation's Betty Jane France Humanitarian Award, resulting in a \$100,000 donation to the Children's Tumor Foundation. His accolades are many. Hanson's work hangs in Warren Buffett's home, as well as countless homes and offices across the country.

Art is the young man's career and livelihood. Philanthropy is his passion. His advice to those facing adversity: "Be passionate in what you do. I defeated CLOD with humor, creativity, drive, forward thinking, and attitude. It's all about passion. If you love art, then create art."

When Hal Hanson's son was young, he worried about his future. Most parents do. Would he be accepted? Would he find fulfilling employment? Would he achieve success? Before he became a teenager, Hanson began to show his dad that he would not be defined by adversity. He has already achieved more in his life than his parents ever dreamed possible. And more than most people experience in a lifetime.

Hanson still has the Italian Natuzzi chair that was given to him, prompting a life of philanthropy. He says, "I believe I will have it the rest of my life." It is his goal to change the world through art. And he's doing it. One textured, colorful, happy painting at a time.

To learn more about the artist and see more of his work visit **JeffHansonArt.com**. ♦



Jeff Hanson painting in his studio  
Photo Credit: 8183 Studio



Jeff and his parents with a painting of the Kansas City nightscape he donated to Kansas City Young Matrons' 2013 gala to benefit people who are homeless.

# GARY, STILL

PEG DANIELS

Friday, 2:00 p.m.  
 “His spinal cord’s severed,” the voice over the phone says. “They helicoptered him to Emergency in Birmingham.”

My legs crumple, and I land on my butt. I’m in Panera Bread, behind the order counter, on their phone. Moments ago, I joined my writing group for our weekly meeting, and Jamie handed me a phone number. The hospital called the restaurant, seeking me. “Gary’s been in a car accident,” Jamie said. She and the two other members of my group sit in a booth ten feet away, oblivious to the words I’m hearing.

Gary, my husband of twenty-five years.

Still on the floor, I turn my back to the restaurant patrons and hunch into a ball, clutch the phone tight in my fist. “Is he going to die?”

My writing group suddenly appears around me in a huddle. I tighten my body, clamp down on my throat. I’m trying to hold in my sobs. I don’t want to make a spectacle of myself. But my body wants to wail.

“Gary’s not in any danger of dying,” the man says. *Is he a doctor?* I don’t ask. He says something about the level of injury, about paralysis.

Oh, God. “He’ll never walk again?”

“He won’t,” the man says.

Not play his beloved golf. Not pace to and fro beside his desk while he thinks about mathematics. Not stand hugging me, my cheek nuzzled into his chest, my head tucked under the curve of his neck.

A hot fear slices through me. “His brain. Is it damaged?”

“No.”

I snatch the “no” from the air, clutch it to my middle and curl myself around it, a precious nugget in all this thick, black, tangled horribleness. He’s still my Gary, his Gary. That’s the important thing.

“He told us where to phone you,” the man says. “He’s worried you shouldn’t drive to Birmingham because of your back problems.”

I laugh, a brittle, jagged sound, immediately embarrassed by what my writing group must be thinking. But I’d laughed at the bizarreness, and in affection: he’s lying there with his spine snapped in two, and he’s worried about my back.

“As if that’d stop me,” I tell the man.

He says to pack for the weekend, which I think is nuts. Where’s he think I’m going after the weekend? Gary surely won’t be discharged. Maybe he thinks I have an outside job. I don’t—eleven years ago, chronic fatigue syndrome forced me to take disability retirement from my math professorship.

The worry flits into my mind that Gary too might be forced to retire from his math professorship, but it flits right out, inconsequential. Despite the man’s reassurances, I’m terrified Gary might die.

“Do you have someone to drive you?” the man says. “You shouldn’t yourself.”

“I’m okay.” I’ve never been less okay.

He insists I shouldn’t, so through choked sobs I ask my group if someone can take me. Surprise and gratitude

surge in me: Eve, by far the youngest of us, a college junior, immediately pipes up and says she will. We leave my car in the parking lot and drive to my house, where I race around and throw kitchenware and food supplies and bedroom articles into boxes; Eve hauls the boxes out and loads them into her trunk. CFS, chronic fatigue syndrome, has made me high-maintenance, my guts intolerant to all but a few foods, so I must bring my ten-pound bag of basmati rice, grocery bag of zucchini, rice cooker, vegetable steamer. CFS has also made me extremely sensitive to cool temperatures, so I must bring my electric bed warmer and wool comforter. And I need my own pillows. And I must bring my laptop and the manuscript I'm working on because God knows how much the hospital will let me see Gary and I'll go crazy just sitting around worrying and—

Oh, the cats!

I run around to several neighbors until I find Sylvia at home, and I tell her Gary's been in a serious accident and would she please feed Blackjack and Tigger, and here's the house key, and the food's in the kitchen closet, and I hate to burden you maybe you can get the other neighbors to take turns I don't know when I'll be back good-bye thank you.

Eve and I are off, and I'm soon regretting having Eve take me. How am I going to get around without a car? But Eve insists I shouldn't drive, and I don't really want to turn back. Oh, why didn't I just jump in the car and go? What if I never see Gary again because I just had to take the time to pack every last thing? I want to yell at Eve to drive faster. Time has slowed, and the mile markers move past us like tombstones marching in a cemetery. I try to relax, get some rest, but I can't. My muscles and nerves are straining and pushing against each other, as if to physically shove my body's molecules forward in time and space.

I curl up in a ball against the passenger door. I alternate trying to meditate and trying not to think. I keep bursting into tears. Not too loudly, I hope. I'm scared the stress is going to knock me into a CFS relapse, and then what good will I be to Gary?

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**CFS, chronic fatigue syndrome, has made me high-maintenance, my guts intolerant to all but a few foods, so I must bring my ten-pound bag of basmati rice, grocery bag of zucchini, rice cooker, vegetable steamer.**

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I'm fifty years old, and I'm not grown up enough for this.

Finally, finally, two hours later we scurry into the Birmingham Hospital Emergency Room and through a metal-detecting security door. While a guard pokes through my book bag, I give Gary's name to a man behind the check-in desk. He scans his list and exclaims, "His first visitor! He's been here a while." Anger and guilt slice through me, but I say nothing. He tells me Gary is having an MRI and to wait here. A little later, a doctor shows up, and he tells me that he's taking Gary in for surgery and that it's good it hasn't been all that long. I want to shake him by the lapels. *Not long? What've you been doing all this damn time?* I'm told it'll be hours before I can see him. Eve suggests I check into a hotel. I stare at her, having no idea how to go about finding one. Besides, I don't want to move from this spot, in case . . .

Eve asks at the desk, and we're told a Marriot sits right across the street. Eve hauls all my stuff to my room. She says she has to get back. I want to beg her to stay. I don't want to be alone with the waiting. Normally I don't need much company—Gary's pretty much enough—and now I've never felt so alone.

I tell Eve I'm grateful for her help, and after hugging me, she leaves.

I go to the hospital waiting room. Though I've written only fiction, I read somewhere that writing can help you get through a crisis. I park myself in a chair, pull out a piece of notebook paper, stare around me, and write what I see. Two dark green couches in the corner. A magazine rack. Love seats, and single chairs, and weird chairs with sling backs. All of them look uncomfortable to sit in—lumpy or hard or ergonomically unsound. Landscape pictures on the wall. The walls are beige. Maybe there's a more accurate word for their color, but who cares. The lighting's florescent, the ceiling tiled. A TV hangs high in one corner; fortunately, the volume is low. A group of four people look like they're camping out together—they've brought blankets and are surrounded by shopping bags full of God knows what. Also in the room, in their own little knots, are a white couple, a white man, and a black family—three women, a man, and a little boy.

I've seated myself as far as possible from all of them. Hearing even a single word of someone else's tragedy might shatter my fragile control, like a resonant pitch shattering glass.

My stomach hurts.

No desire to write more, I put away my pen and paper. I get up and read notices tacked on a wall. Many announce the meetings of various religious support groups for families of patients. One is a Saint Jude prayer card. Saint Jude, patron saint of desperate causes. Saint Jude, helper of the hopeless, my path is

strewn with thorns. Bring visible help where help is almost—

I stop reading. If Saint Jude had wanted to be helpful, he should've prevented the car accident—not offered, if you prayed to him, to possibly show up afterwards. And for what? The man on the phone told me Gary won't walk again. Bitterness churns through my guts. All the rotten people in the world that God could've chosen to do this to, and he chose the best.

\* \* \*

Hours pass. At last my name is called. A woman leads me to a private office in Neurosurgery where, I'm told, the doctor will speak to me. I perch on the edge of a leather chair. Almost immediately, a man and a woman wearing business suits enter. The man introduces himself and his companion, and it immediately flies out of my head what position the woman holds. The man performed the surgery on Gary.

I concentrate on his words, trying to fix them in my mind: Gary suffered a severe injury to the spine, broken ribs, bruised lungs, broken pelvis, and a broken right index finger. The surgery this afternoon was a spinal decompression, during which they found a hematoma choking the spinal cord. They went in to relieve the pressure. Unfortunately, they discovered the injury to the spine was worse than they initially hoped—the spinal cord was destroyed at the T4 level, about nipple height. Below that level, Gary has permanently lost all feeling and mobility.

The doctor falls silent and watches me. The woman too fastens hawk-eyes on me. Worried I'm going to leap up and scream?

"He'll never walk again," I say, still trying to somehow grasp that reality. The doctor nods. "But his brain's all right," I say. The doctor nods again. "That's the important thing," I say. "We can handle this if his brain's all right."

Again, silence. Do they expect me to ask questions? I can't think of any. All I'm thinking is, I already knew the most important things they had to tell me; so why are they eyeing me with pinched, sympathetic smiles as if waiting for me to fall apart? Am I supposed to fall apart now?

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**If Saint Jude had wanted to be helpful, he should've prevented the car accident—not offered, if you prayed to him, to possibly show up afterwards.**

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I feel like someone is flaying the outer layer of my skin one small swath at a time.

The doctor stands, the woman stands, I stand. "Can I see him?" I ask.

"Soon," the doctor says. "They're bringing him up and settling him in the Neurosurgery ICU."

He shakes my hand and leaves, and the woman directs me to the ICU. There, a woman at the desk tells me they'll let me know when I can go to Gary's room, that it'll probably be another half hour or so. God, another half hour with only myself and my worries.

Only now does it occur to me that I don't have to be alone in this. I ask, and the woman at the desk says I can use their phone—I don't own a cell phone. I think of calling Mom, but I don't want to wake her up—it's eleven at night Central time, and she's on Eastern time, and she's eighty-six. I call my older sister, who's on Mountain time.

"Gary's been in a terrible car accident," I say to Janet, and bust into tears. I

don't want to disturb the other people on the floor, don't want to display my fears and grief. But more than any other time this day—because she's family?—I'm racked with sobs, and I can barely speak. I get across the basics—spinal cord severed, will never walk. Whatever she replies goes right out of my head, other than she'll call the rest of the family tomorrow and a request to keep her updated. I hang up and call Gary's sister, Norma, feeling his side of the family should know, too, as soon as possible. I'm certain I can give her the news more calmly, now that I've gotten things out of my system with Janet. But I lose it again.

Shortly after the calls, I'm told I can see Gary.

I rush down the hall, toward a single-occupancy room. Before I'm allowed to go in, I'm made to put on latex gloves and gossamer-thin, jaundice-yellow hospital gown and cap. I enter the room.

White, white walls. A slit of window. Chilled air, like dry ice vaporizing. A huge cast running down Gary's right arm from elbow to fingertips. A throng of machines standing sentinel around his bedside, multitudinous tubing and wires snaking out from under his bedsheet and trailing through the air or along the floor to machines and fluid bags.

I close in, notice the tube going down his mouth, another one up his nose. God, he can't speak. All these last hours I've been longing to hear his voice, to gain from it some sort of relief that he's still him, to cling to that anchor, to receive a sign his accident isn't an utter catastrophe, to know I truly haven't lost him.

Flat in the bed, he doesn't see me. I carefully wade my way through the tubes and wires. *My path is strewn with thorns.*

“Hi, Pookie,” I say. And then, an inane, “What a fine mess you’ve gotten yourself in.”

He rolls his eyes, no hint of humor on his face, the tube down his mouth preventing a frown, grimace, whatever. A deep shame flares up and burns my face. Does he think I’m making light of the situation? I don’t know why I said that. I guess to relieve some of the enormous anxiety I’m feeling. I’ve only increased it.

“I love you,” I say. “Sorry I didn’t get here sooner.” Sorry I wasn’t riding in the ambulance with him, flying in the helicopter with him, standing beside his gurney holding his hand as he waited for surgery. Sorry he didn’t have that absolute assurance I was in this with him all the way.

He’s in the middle of a wide hospital bed, and machines at the top sides of his bed prevent my standing any closer to his head than about his waist level, so I have to strain to reach his face to stroke his cheek and forehead. Like a cat, he likes his head petted. He’s told me he’s liked to be stroked that way ever since he was a little boy and he would lie in his mom’s lap and she would “pet” him. I wish I could take off the latex gloves so he can feel my touch. I wish I could kiss him, but I can’t stretch my upper body far enough to get my face to his. What I wish most, most of all, is that I could crawl into the bed with him, and hold him, and have him hold me.

I stroke his forehead and up into his curly brown hair. The skin under his eyes is purplish, bruised. From the accident? He doesn’t look nearly as banged up as I’d feared. I’d figured an accident that broke his spine would’ve bashed up his face and left more than one limb in a cast.

His eyes gaze off into the distance. Or inward. He is definitely alert and aware, whereas I’d thought he might be out of it, with drooping, fluttering eyelids, drugged to the gills or dazed from the

accident. But his expression, masked by that mouth tube, seems flat.

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**As the elevator doors close, without any of Gary’s words to tether me, I feel cut off, alone, adrift, an island floating farther and farther away from all other land masses.**

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Oh, God, what’s he thinking? What’s bottled up inside his head? The worst of imaginings floods into that void in me created by the absence of his words. Is he overwhelmed, hurled into depression? Will despair break him? From the years my CFS was most vicious, I know well that spirit-sapping sense of utter defeat personal calamity can bring. It’s horrible picturing that happening to Gary. In the over twenty-five years I’ve known him, I can count on one hand the times I’ve seen him angry or down. He’s the most even person I know. Even and generous. Optimistic and supportive. Loving. Kind. Always ready with a smile . . .

What can I say to him? How can I comfort him, give him courage?

“I’m right next door at the Marriott,” I say, feeling helpless. “I can literally be here in five minutes.”

His eyes flick to mine, then away.

A nurse comes in and tells me “we” should let him rest; I can see him next at 10:00 a.m. I kiss my fingers and press them to his cheek, then I move toward the exit and peel off my gloves, cap, and gown. Still in the room, I drop them into a metal waste can and wash my hands in the nearby sink, as the sign

directs me. “Bye, Pookie,” I call to him. “I love you. See you tomorrow as soon as they’ll let me.” No response, not even a lift of his uninjured left hand. I leave his room, and my tennis shoes softly thud against the vinyl flooring in the silent corridors, as empty of people in this midnight hour as main street in a ghost town—but a ghost town lit by bright, florescent lights. I walk out of the ICU, through the waiting room, and into the elevator. As the elevator doors close, without any of Gary’s words to tether me, I feel cut off, alone, adrift, an island floating farther and farther away from all other land masses.

In my hotel room, I think maybe I should eat something because I haven’t had anything since before I got the news. But lunch is still lumped in my glued-shut guts, and anything more will just lump there with it. I change into pajamas, get into bed, and close my eyes, but I’m not aware of ever dozing off. I repeat my meditation mantra over and over, and whenever I’m on the brink of falling asleep, a burst of adrenalin shoots me wide awake. *Danger! Danger!* My body’s systems are shrieking. *You must remain alert!*

I’m afraid that when I next go see Gary, I’ll find him dead.

Saturday, 9:50 a.m.

Ever since I left Gary last night, my body has been revved up for this instant, and I rush out of the hotel room to the Neurosurgery ICU waiting room. The other people there wait in their chairs, but I stand with nose nearly pressed to the closed ICU door. Soon, people drift over to line up behind me. They chat about their loved ones, but I keep my eyes straight ahead, keep to myself, tune them out.

My watch now shows a few minutes after ten, and I want to slam myself into the door and crash it open—how dare they make me wait! The door begins to swing toward me, and I squeeze through, zip past the nurse, and dash down the corridors. Outside Gary’s

room, dreading a repeat of last night when he responded so little to my presence, I throw on hospital gown, cap, and gloves, then dodge all the tubing and wires and rush to Gary's side. Flat in bed, he meets my eyes. He lifts his left hand with its trailing IV line and makes a scribbling motion.

A skyrocket of realization shoots through me. He can write! Of course! Why didn't this occur to me earlier? We're not imprisoned inside our own heads. I don't know how I could've stood being locked up alone in mine much longer.

I race to the doorway and ask a passing nurse for paper. She brings it, plus a black Sharpie. I clamp the paper in the jaws of a nursing clipboard, slide the marker between Gary's left thumb and forefinger, and hold the clipboard at an angle in front of him.

What will his first words be? I'm aching for "I love you." But other possibilities claw through my mind. Will he tell me of the terror of a car smashing into his, of bones breaking, vertebrae shearing, his legs refusing to move? Will he sorrow over his loss? I'd be crying and raging my devastation, my anger—at myself, God, the other driver, the unfairness—

In a mostly legible hand, he prints, "Email Michel"—Michel is the head of the math department—"tell him someone needs to take my classes." The thick, meandering letters ranging from one-half to two inches high, Gary fills two pages with an explanation I'm to give Michel of what Gary had been planning to cover with his graduate students the rest of the semester.

His message is so far from anything I'd expected that my mind does an off-kilter little flip, amazed by him: While my thoughts have been spinning off in one, catastrophizing direction, his have apparently spun off in quite another.

I don't know how a person can possibly cope with sudden, permanent paralysis. I don't know what it means to live that way. I don't know what he'll be able to do for himself, what I'll have to do for him. I don't know how I'll be able to manage it, physically and emotionally, along with my CFS. But the strokes of Gary's Sharpie prove truths as incontrovertible as the mathematics: He's still him. His brain is fine. He's strong, and he will deal with this new reality one moment at a time. And it won't break him.

I won't let it break me.

The PA system announces that the visiting period has ended. Careful of the tubing and wires, I manage to crane myself over that vast bed and give him a good-bye kiss, not too close to that mouth tube in case my germs can somehow migrate across his cheek.

Gary scribbles, "When will you be back?"

He can wear no watch because the arm cast and the tubing, and he can't turn his head to see the clock fixed to the wall. "At 2:00. That's three-and-a-half hours from now."

I'll get someone to drive me to Walmart before then, so I can buy him his own clock.

On my way out through the hospital waiting room, my glance falls on the prayer card. Saint Jude or no, a small patch beneath my feet clears of thorns. ♦

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AMY LEFKOF

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## BATTLE OF FALLUJAH—A WOMAN'S BATTLE CRY

I am lying in the bed  
that we used to share,  
my face flushed,  
hot followed by cold.  
I think hormones maybe, or  
maybe separation from husband,  
or maybe shame in not knowing  
what is next.

I hear my mother's voice,  
stretching all the way from my childhood to  
me now,  
"Stop picking at the sore,  
you'll only make it worse."

I try to tell her that I can't see my way out,  
I don't want to come out from under the covers,  
I don't want to open the drapes.

My children are away at college,  
the old dog has died,  
my husband heeded the call of his mid-life crisis.  
All the stick figures on the rear windshield  
peeled off  
one  
by  
one.  
Only the leased car and me remain.

Yet there is no comfort in this wallowing,  
In the sweaty past sticking to me like  
pajamas on a hot summer night.

I roll over and turn on NPR.  
It's an interview with a female army veteran.  
She lost both arms in the Battle of Fallujah.  
She wears T-shirts that say,  
"Best thumb wrestler," and "worst guitar player."  
She says she has had so many opportunities to live life —  
*since* she lost her arms.

I shut off the radio and get out of bed.

WILLIAM H. McCANN, JR.

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## NIGHTMARE: SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 1963

It was midnight, Saturday night  
John Wilkes Booth was being burned alive  
In a Virginia barn  
Waking me abruptly.

I lay in my bed  
Listening to my roommates sleep  
But the vividness of my dream kept me awake  
So out I went to where the night watch was.

As I walked up  
    She set aside her Chicago paper  
Detailing one man's, one family's, one nation's  
    Nightmare  
To talk to me  
    About mine.

And then,  
As if to change the topic,  
She taught me how to lose at solitaire  
A nightmare to all  
    Like me  
        Who cannot abide losing.

# SINGING SAMMY'S SONG

JOHN MAXWELL O'BRIEN

What if his next suicide attempt *is it*? How many times can he launch his wheelchair into traffic without earning oblivion? Then what'll you do, spend the rest of your life in sackcloth and ashes because you didn't risk your damn job for him? He's your nephew!

It'll probably take a little sleight of hand and a few outright lies. Am I up to it? There's a huge risk here. The dean might see through a kabuki dance. If he does, you can forget about getting tenure. You'll be out on your ear. Poof—everything you've worked for goes up in smoke.

It's not Sammy's fault, it's the luck of the draw. That merciless lottery trapped a luminous mind in a crippled body. Sammy's amazingly well-read and has a scorching sense of humor. The trouble is only my sister can fully grasp what he's saying. It takes me a month of Mondays to unscramble one of his phrases. When I do there's al-

ways a priceless nugget to be had, and I shower him with thunderous applause. Paltry consolation for an eloquent voice struck dumb.

It's 1967, not the nineteenth century. You'd think *someone* in the school system would be able to recognize a diamond in the rough by now. But no, Sammy's treated like soiled furniture. Store him away in the basement with others perceived as human rejects. It's been five years now, but that image of Sammy in the seventh grade still haunts me . . .

*There I am, on the balls of my feet, peering through octagonal wires embedded in the pane of glass in his classroom door. Five children with cerebral palsy are in the room, all in wheelchairs. A couple of girls have stationed themselves in the far corner, directing their eyes toward the window while their heads bob up and down spasmodically. Two boys wheel themselves back and forth on either side of the teacher as he sits with his feet up on the desk thumbing through a tabloid. He raises his right arm whenever the speed limit is exceeded, and the offending party*

*slows down. Sammy is parked by the door in his wheelchair and is wielding an outsized pencil crowned with a huge eraser. He's scratching away at a New York Times crossword puzzle my sister enlarged and taped securely to a thick piece of cardboard. Sammy's been at those puzzles for almost a year now. He hasn't completed any of them yet, but he's getting there.*

It's a different story now. Sammy finishes his puzzles. He's into Salinger, Hemingway, and Joyce, but the school says he's an eighth-grade reader. On what basis? They don't know how to test him. It would take a whole day for him to finish an exam and even then, they wouldn't know how to decipher his scribbles. So, they pick a number out of a hat, slap it on him, and wheel him back downstairs. His high school will give him a worthless piece of paper in June and send him on his way. Colleges don't know how to deal with Sammy either; they've been using his "reading level" as an excuse to reject him.

With nowhere to go, Sammy is flirting with extinction again and he's getting more earnest with each attempt. My sister was teary and incoherent the last time she called. All I could gather was that she was desperate, and I'm the only one he listens to. I had to get there fast and bring something shiny and cerebral with me.

I remember every word uttered:

"I have a twisted mind in a twisted body and bring nothing but *disease* to everyone. What's the point of carrying on if you're nothing more than a disconcerting eyesore?"

*Shiny and cerebral.*

"Sammy are you familiar with Menelaus's encounter with Proteus?"

He looks at me quizzically.

"I think you'll like the story, but first some basics. Do you know who Menelaus was?"

He nods and symbolically crosses his arms, signaling that he's learned about him from the crossword puzzles.

"How about Proteus?"

He shakes his head.

"Well Proteus was a sea god they called the Old Man of the Sea. He had prophetic powers and could change himself into whatever shape and form he chose to."

Sammy says, "Hemingway."

"You're thinking of 'The Old Man and the Sea.' The same thought passed my mind. But—back to the story.

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**“. . . What's the point of carrying on if you're nothing more than a disconcerting eyesore?"**

---

"Menelaus is trying to return to Sparta after the Trojan War, but he gets stuck on the island of Pharos off the coast of Egypt. There he discovers that the only way he'll ever get home is if he learns how to from Proteus. The trouble is when any mortal approaches him, Proteus transforms himself into a lion, or water, or fire—something incommunicado. Do you know what that word means, Sammy?"

"Yaaahs. Lihhhke meee!"

"Ha! Well, Mr. Know-it-All, now you're also aware of where the word protean comes from, and at no extra cost."

He smiles, nods his head, and crosses his arms again: acknowledging that the information will be useful in solving his puzzles.

"Good. Where was I? Oh, yes. Menelaus does some research and learns through the god's daughter that if he can get close enough to snatch Proteus while the god's still in approachable

form and keep him in his grip until he's gone through every conceivable shape on earth, the god will eventually return to his original shape. Then Proteus will be obliged to give Menelaus the answer he's seeking. Menelaus grabs him, waits it out, gets his answer, and makes his way back to Sparta!"

Sammy shrugs his shoulders, looking confused.

"Moral of the story?"

He nods.

"Knowledge is the key to changing any situation, and we all come in thousands of different shapes. What counts is up here," I point to my head, "and what's in here," my open palm pats my chest above my heart. "Not the envelope they arrive in." I wave my hand up and down my exterior.

"And—wait a minute—Sammy." I point to my head again. "You and I think alike. Does that make my mind twisted?"

I raise my palms in his direction, and shout, "Don't answer that!"

His face brightens, and he says, "Wayyyyt. Aaaahl tuhhhhp thahhht."

Sammy then raises his hand, crooks his finger, and points to his skull. He inhales deeply, savoring what he's about to say. After several encores, I'm able to unravel his question. "You know how some people run around like a chicken without a head?"

I join in the game, nodding skeptically.

“Well, when I get crazy, I crawl around like a head without a chicken!”

I laugh lustily and Sammy heehaws at my reaction.

\* \* \*

Our conversations and his crossword puzzles kept Sammy busy for a while, but he’s back courting disaster. I can’t just sit here waiting for him to hit the jackpot in traffic. I’ve got a plan. It’s a cockamamie plan, but lo and behold, Dean Irwin’s agreed to consider it.

Irwin’s a pompous ass. There’s no other way to describe him. When I told Sammy about Irwin waking people up on park benches to tell them about his idiotic monograph on accents in seventeenth century French literature, Sammy roared. Still, give the devil his due, Irwin’s called a special meeting of the admissions committee to consider Sammy’s case. What we’re going to ask for is special student status for Sammy. That would buy time, and time means hope.

There’s Sammy and my sister knocking at the door.

“We’re all set, Sis, I’ll bring him to your house after we’re finished. Cross your fingers, burn a black cat at midnight, and say a few novenas, will you?”

She smiles, kisses me, kisses Sammy, and leaves.

When we arrive on campus in front of the administration building, I crouch down so I’m eye to eye with Sammy, who’s in his wheelchair.

“We’re going to do some role-playing at this meeting. Are you up to it?”

He smiles and nods.

“Good. You’ll be asked questions—God knows what type and how many—by people from the college, and I want you to answer all of them. If it calls for a short answer, be brief. If the question is complicated, take more time to answer it. You *don’t* have to worry about what you say, because, to tell you the truth, they won’t understand a goddamn word of it.”

He hisses with laughter.

“Our plan is to capitalize on them not having the slightest notion of what you’re talking about, but pretending they do. Most professors would rather be flayed alive than admit they can’t comprehend what anybody’s talking about. So, you might as well be reciting a Sanskrit menu as far as they’re concerned. If my premise is correct this will work in our favor, and they’ll be afraid you’re saying something too intelligent to be ignored or denied.”

Sammy smiles.

The trouble here is if Irwin suspects I’m trying to pull a fast one, he’s certain to sabotage my tenure. I’ll have to count on his strong suits—arrogance and hypocrisy.

“Are you sure you’re up to this, Sammy?”

“Yahhhhs,” he says, with a glint of mischief in his eye.

Sammy’s got a touch of the devil in him and a great name to boot. If only Proteus would make an epiphany one night and let this lad wake up in a serviceable body. Easy does it Gogarty, one miracle at a time.

“OK. Let’s give it a go.”

I wheel Sammy into the meeting. There sits the dean of admissions, the registrar, the dean of students, the chair-

man of the English department and, of course, Francis Irwin, the dean of faculty. The questions begin with Sammy being asked to confirm the information on his application.

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**“Our plan is to capitalize on them not having the slightest notion of what you’re talking about, but pretending they do . . .**

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“Is your name Samuel Beckett?”

“You are nineteen years of age, correct?”

Sammy’s brief sounds and gestures suffice until further elaboration is called for. Then on cue, as the questions become more intricate, Sammy starts rattling away like a Gatling gun. His monologues, of course, are incomprehensible to all parties concerned. Irwin predictably sits there unfazed, as if he were processing every nuance of Sammy’s noisy exhalations. At first the committee mirrors Irwin’s pretense, but lacking his stamina when it comes to duplicity, they begin stirring uncomfortably. The dean of admissions is the first to look at me imploringly, then the chairman of the English department, and finally, everyone except Irwin.

Uh-oh, there goes my premise. Irwin alone is living up to my expectations. The others look like they’re wondering what any professor could possibly do with someone like Sammy. I know what they’re going to say. It’s a commendable idea, but unfortunately impractical, we’re simply not equipped to *do him justice*.

What should I do?

There's an alternative, but it could spell disaster for me: mimicking Cyrano de Bergerac and having Sammy sound like Albert Einstein *redux*. Make him so brilliant that it would be unconscionable not to offer him a chance to prove himself.

Now they're staring at me apprehensively . . . or is it disapprovingly? Do I retreat or forge ahead?

Okay traffic, here I come.

"Excuse me, gentlemen. May I be of assistance here? Simply to ensure that Sammy's answers are *fully* understood? I can see you get the gist of his remarks, but perhaps you'd be willing to repeat a few of the more complex questions, so I can clarify his answers for you."

The dean of students turns to Irwin, and after receiving his approval says, "Yes, yes, by all means, certainly, why thank you, Professor Gogarty."

"Once again, Mr. Beckett," he continues, "what makes you think that you'll be able to perform satisfactorily at the college level? We're primarily concerned, of course, with the adverse effect that this situation might have on you, should it prove to be . . . shall we say . . . out of your element."

I sit there staring intently at Sammy's right eye while he speaks, occasionally lifting my eyebrow, nodding, or smiling broadly, as he splutters on.

"Sammy says that since he has not yet had any experience at this level, he cannot, in good conscience, offer any guarantee that he *will* succeed. However, he thought you might like to know something about his own academic ordeal and the insensitivity of school administrators he's encountered at lower levels. They have, Sammy says, thus

far looked upon him as a burden rather than a challenge. This is how many others with similar conditions have been treated as well, he says. Professing to help keep us out of harm's way, they assign us to wardens rather than teachers.

"Their perceptions of us are as distorted, Sammy says, as my body. In their myopia"—I interrupt myself to say, "Good word, Sammy"—"they treat us as if we were part of a sub-human species best kept out of sight. Uncle Aloysius"—I point to myself—"assures me that the leadership here at Municipal College is of far superior timber—more enlightened and responsive than any I've ever encountered. May I say that the thoughtful questions emanating from this committee have convinced me that my uncle's assessment is quite accurate."

Irwin and the others shake their heads in tacit agreement, masking their own astonishment at Sammy's fluency.

The chairman of the English department resumes the questioning. "You speak quite well, Mr. Beckett. That tells me you've done considerable reading and have grasped what you've read. Kindly share with us who some of your favorite authors are."

A brief medley of inscrutable sounds emerges from Sammy's dribbling mouth.

"Sammy's delighted with the question. He asks, however, if you might be more specific. Fiction or nonfiction?"

"Let's say fiction."

A blustering soliloquy follows, reaching a climax in Sammy's wheezing laugh at some indecipherable joke. I chuckle, noticing Irwin raising the left corner of his upper lip in a vapid smile, as if he's understood every syllable.

All attention shifts to me.

"Well, Sammy obviously enjoyed the question. His favorite authors are Molière, Racine, Proust, Huysmans, Baudelaire, Goethe, Hesse, Marquez, Lawrence." I interrupt myself to ask Sammy which Lawrence he's referring to—D. H. or T. E. "Sammy means D. H.," I say, and then carry on with my fanciful translation.

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## Now they're staring at me apprehensively. . . or is it disapprovingly? Do I retreat or forge ahead?

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"C.P. Snow, his own namesake Samuel Beckett, and of course James Augustine Aloysius Joyce—that, gentlemen, was when Sammy pointed to me. And, in the latter lies the joke that Sammy became fitful over. He says that being in the company of Uncle Aloysius is always an occasion to *re-Joyce*. 'Thank you, Sammy. And, by the way, you *are* getting better at puns.' He concluded by saying that he was reluctant to even mention the likes of Molière and Racine in the company of someone who is so illustrious in the field of seventeenth century French literature."

All eyes focus on Irwin, who, rarely pleased by what anyone else says, is actually smiling in Sammy's direction. Irwin announces that the committee will confer privately for a few moments. I ask if we should leave the room. He shakes his head. After a few minutes of whispering, Irwin looks towards Sammy and issues the verdict.

“We think you are worthy of taking a chance on, Mr. Beckett, and are therefore granting you permission to register at the college as a special student. You may enroll in no more than three courses for this semester, and the Academic Standards Committee will review your status at the end of the semester. Is that acceptable?”

Sammy brays out his thanks with enough clarity for everyone present to understand him.

We did it! Well, at least this will keep him off the streets for a while.

Who knows?

Maybe one day he’ll sit, editor-in-chief of the *New York Times* crossword puzzles, tormenting like-minded fanatics with abstruse esoterica, and singing *his own* song.

I, too, thank everyone for their time and consideration and proceed to wheel Sammy across campus. Then I stop and kneel down, staring at Sammy’s lips while posing *my* question.

“Now, Sammy, I want you to speak *very* slowly, and *very* carefully. Got it?”

He does.

“Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, what in God’s name did you say in there?”

Sammy convulses with laughter. When he regains control of himself, he raises his left eyebrow and delivers what he has to say like a caring midwife:

“Exactly what you said, Uncle Aloysius, *word for word*.”

I laugh out loud and shake my head.

“You’ll do Sammy. You’ll do *quite well*.” ♦

## Call for submissions

**K**ALEIDOSCOPE  
Debra Johanyak, Editor-in-Chief

*Kaleidoscope* magazine has a creative focus that examines the experience of disability through literature and the fine arts. A pioneer in the field of disability studies, this award-winning publication expresses the diversity of the disability experience from a variety of perspectives including: individuals, families, friends, caregivers, educators and healthcare professionals, among others. The material chosen for *Kaleidoscope* challenges and overcomes stereotypical, patronizing, and sentimental attitudes about disability through nonfiction, fiction, poetry, and visual art. Although the content focuses on aspects related to disability, writers with and without disabilities are welcome to submit their work.

• Double spaced, typewritten

• 5,000 word maximum

• Electronic submissions preferred

Email submissions accepted at [kaleidoscope@udsakron.org](mailto:kaleidoscope@udsakron.org) or online at [kaleidoscopeonline.org](http://kaleidoscopeonline.org).

# CONTROL

NANCY SCOTT

**1:00 a.m.**

I wake to a stutter of trouble—generator grinding up to growl, probable emergency lights for halls, and stairs. I immediately know the sound but don't breathe for a few seconds, then check my Braille watch to find twenty after one.

Vibration settles in my palms and shoulders, moves me out of bed to barefoot pace with torque underfoot. No refrigerator hum or feel of the puffing air purifier. I tell myself it will just last a few minutes. I won't even need to reset the bedroom clock, plugged in but with built-in battery forgiveness, for several minutes.

I can't see outside to know if this is just our apartment building or the whole neighborhood. I hope it's the whole town.

The battery-powered scanner says traffic lights from 13th Street up are out. Seven blocks. Lots of people with a few up and aware. Good. "They" will fix this soon. But it feels like I'm the only one awake.

Sleep is out—even after I close the April window against annoying sound and diesel fumes. What about power surges and explosions and losing freezer food? I must stay awake to stay safe. And to keep other people safe. Most of my neighbors are not near the generator—two floors down directly below my bedroom window. They will sleep through this. Are they lucky or oblivious?

I turn off power strips for cordless phones and TV and radios. It's 1:45 a.m. I get dressed, think of what I'd take if I had to leave forever. My poems and essays first, as many Braille notebooks as I can carry. And my talking word processor. Cash, cell, prescriptions—I comfort myself by making the list. If I pack the easy things, I will be too prepared and nothing bad will happen.

**2:00 a.m.**

I've lived in this Pennsylvania town all but the first two years of my life. Fifty-three years now. There have been few multiple-hour power outages. There's no weird weather to explain this one. It must be a transformer or someone hit a pole.

We don't need fans or air conditioning. Imagine a power outage like this in the winter.

I find and assemble the small stuff on my desk. Moving around is no problem. Would anyone take me with them if we had to leave? Do I have enough money for bribery? About \$100 if you count the fives and ones. Each denomination is folded in a particular way so I know what I'm counting.

Someone should invent a machine to read money denominations.

I open the Braille cabinet and fondle. I am not famous enough. "I am a good and prolific writer." Does chanting help? "I'm supposed to be here." "I live in a safe building."

Writing has saved me from a lack of discipline. Perhaps it has kept me here. It will outlive me.

Police have gone back to accidents and domestics and drunk teens. My head is too busy to have sympathy for them. Everywhere in my apartment feels or sounds wrong, or both. I wish I could hear someone else up, but there is just the roar and the vibration and the too-loud audiobook I can't pay attention to. Even murder isn't enough distraction.

Scanner back on, I end up in the rocker. I want no more lacks in my life. I want safe basics. I propose deals about word counts and dusting. My higher power likes such drama.

I talk to my dead relatives. They had no discipline and nothing saved them. But they help me stay here. I am not brave. Ask any of them.

#### **3:00 a.m.**

I listen at my apartment front door but do not go into the hall. Through pitted paint, my ear to the crack between door and frame, the vibration still assaults.

I call the electric company but our building pays electric so I have no account. They say they are aware but give me no reassuring time for restoration.

How much longer will I be able to live alone? I've been blind forever but other things could happen. In my middle fifties, I've already outlived all of my immediate family except my mother. What will be the tipping point?

I am not a risk-taker. I need my space to always be in the same order. I have not always lived alone, having been daughter and sister and wife. I know the trade-offs with other people. They are eyes to see fast and read and interpret, but they move things like spillables and breakables that I will always find and spill and break. I also know the challenges of orphaned air.

Are there sighted people searching for flashlights trying to get to the bathroom? I have no trouble since this is my normal environment minus the wrongness. I get around in familiar space all the time. For me, it's not dark. I've never seen light, but I'm pretty sure that I don't see dark. It's the unexpected that scares me.

If this were early evening, I'd check on neighbors and offer flashlights. I like having flashlights for the poor people who are now visually impaired. It's fun and mean. My husband never had to worry about such things. If the power went out, he'd just call, "Nan, get the flashlight."

I used to be able to see flashlights out of the corner of my left eye. In college, an ophthalmologist told me he was shining a bright but narrow light right at me and I wasn't reacting. "No more light perception." No more knowing if flashlights were on.

I again move around listening for additional dangers. I wave my arms in incantation. I want morning and birds and sun on my face. Don't rescues happen in the morning?

#### **4:00 a.m.**

I am exhausted. It is 4:23 a.m. according to the battery-operated, living room talking clock. I think I have dozed, sitting up. I hope someone else was willing good outcomes for those minutes. I hear a pitch change. My bedroom talking clock announces, "voice plus is on." And then I hear silence that shifts to the right hum of F-sharp water pumps and that undefinable white noise of current. And the wonderful, ragged return of the refrigerator. I statue-station myself in the hallway toward the bedroom where I can hear all the rooms. No sizzle. No explosions.

I take a deep breath. I relax, a little. I am not trivial.

Power stays on. I wait ten minutes and open the refrigerator door, sniffing and then tasting the milk. It's not even really warm yet.

I explore the whole apartment with hands and feet. I turn on power strips, check for dial tones.

At 4:47 a.m., I reset the bedroom clock including an alarm for 7:30 a.m. so I can catch a little more sleep. I will put the small stuff away later. I will start writing about this later . . .

#### **Today**

I cannot dream of the money identifier small enough to fit in a pocket that will cost less than \$100. I cannot imagine that my old scanner would become obsolete in favor of computer options not much bigger than a cell phone. I cannot conceive of the forty-nine-hour power outage of Hurricane Sandy or the rewiring of my building's new electrical system in frozen January, both of which I survived. Good thing I had some practice. ♦

ALAN HARRIS

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## PEARLS

In the nursing home cafeteria  
she wears her pearl necklace to breakfast  
her fingers caressing each gem  
like it was Aladdin's lamp  
and as each wish is granted  
she travels through time  
from pearl to pearl  
secretly opening doors to the past

The staff physician blames her age  
falsely accusing longevity  
for suspending her belief in tomorrow  
and precluding any coherent  
interest in today  
But if only science understood  
she doesn't simply  
recall and remember  
she returns

to call out her lover's name for the first time again  
to calm her newborn's fear of the light  
her toddler's fear of the dark  
to caress her mother's hand for the last time once more  
reliving moments that made a difference  
moments that prove to her heart she was there  
moments that ensure her humanity  
shining forever  
like pearls strung along the thread

MONICA SHAH

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## THE UNINVITED

When she first arrived  
I was a polite host.  
I did not rail and scream  
and send her away.

I can manage a few hours of this  
I thought.  
She is but a small and insignificant part of my day  
I thought.

Little did I know she would return  
again and again and again.  
An unwelcome guest  
Creeping back to disrupt my life.

The more I tried to disengage her  
the harder she fought to stay.  
She seemed to feel it was simply her right  
to take up permanent residence.

I began to panic.  
I sought out help.  
I read all about her.  
I talked to everyone.

Weren't there laws against this?

Why are you here?  
I asked.  
When will you leave?  
I asked.

I think she merely laughed at me.

I called in the troops.  
She smirked at the doctors.  
She ignored the therapists.  
She didn't even care for the drugs.

My efforts to expel her  
were met with scorn.  
She grew stronger  
as I grew weaker.

I kept trying to send her away  
but she thinks she belongs here now.  
And frankly I can no longer remember  
a time that she didn't.

# LINES IN A NOTEBOOK

FELIKS JEZIORANSKI

Dave sat down on his couch, crossed his legs, and knit his fingers around his raised knee. On the coffee table in front of him was a marked-up copy of an essay he had written, recently rejected by a magazine called *Challenging the Challenged*. Seeing the manuscript, his natural impassiveness darkened.

Dave's facial expression rarely betrayed what he was feeling. He was aware of this and thankful when it meant he was a calming presence in his family in spite of what was going on inside him. At the time, for instance, the bout of anxiety he was suffering was belied by the generally relaxed air about him.

The essay examined a tendency he had noticed which he felt undermined some parents in bringing up their differently-abled children. He believed there was an unconscious impulse in certain parents and other caregivers to pretend to be pleased by just about *anything* such children do. Whereas, Dave argued in his article, the healthy thing for both grownup and child is to be emotionally honest and provide positive reinforcement when suitable, instead of beaming proudly practically at random.

He looked over at his son, Ian, who was lying in the fetal position on the living room carpet. Ian's body was crossed by a rectangle of sunlight from the window above him so that his upper half shone brightly. By contrast, it looked like his legs had been shut off.

Forgetting his article for the moment, Dave smiled at how cute Ian looked. He had on a colorful tracksuit with soccer-themed prints and his loose socks appeared to be oozing out of the elastic cuffs of his pants like toothpaste from tubes.

The smile fell away as Dave's mind returned to the cause of his anxiety; namely, that preventing accidents in the household had come to require tiresome vigilance. There were locks on the cabinets and drawers, dangerous objects were kept out of reach, and Ian's meals were presented to him in small pieces. Still, the previous week he had pulled a carrot from the kitchen counter and carelessly bit off the fat end. Returning from the bathroom, distractedly wiping moisture from her hands to her shirt front as she chuckled about something she had heard earlier in the day, his mother Leona found Ian choking. As she gave him the Heimlich manoeuvre he threw his elbows in panic and rage and hit her hard in the face.

Dave looked down at Ian and felt love and fear for him flaring painfully in his chest.

At birth the boy had been so weak—a tiny, quivering, pale body veined with faint blue lines. But now, at thirteen, if he weren't as stooped he would be tall for his age.

Dave's mind drifted back to his article. What was frustrating was how he could sense from the tone of the rejection slip he'd received that it wasn't the quality of the writing which was lacking but that the editors had completely missed his point. He knew they ultimately thought he'd been trying to suggest that parents of differently abled

children are displeased with them, overall, and might as well go ahead and admit it. This especially annoyed Dave because he read the magazine religiously and quite liked it. How could they have so brazenly misread his message? For goodness sake, wasn't his whole theory in line with the very name of the publication? Wasn't he all for "challenging the challenged?"

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## Hearing the word *bed*, Ian let out a menacing howl.

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Ian inclined his head like someone had tapped him on the shoulder. He had heard the sounds heralding his favorite time of day, the sounds of his mother's car rolling into the driveway. He wanted to make it to the front hall before she came inside, so up on his feet he staggered gleefully around the corner. He hugged her amidst the grocery bags she had set down and she stroked his hair and patted his round shoulders.

The shiny bruise below Leona's eye accentuated her tiredness. Her chin hung and kept her thin lips apart. When Dave kissed her, Ian hit him jealously in the ribs. The parents decided not to respond and shortly he was back on the carpet by the window in the living room. The sun had dropped below their neighbor's wooden fence across the way, so sunlight from between the planks ran over Ian like lines in a notebook.

"Let's sit on the couch and you can tell me how your day was," Leona said to Dave, who was looking into the living room from the hall.

Dave went around turning on the lights. To make Leona laugh, he did so running, like he was an athlete being timed. He then took her hand and led her to the sofa.

"Sorry about the BO, I haven't had time to shower," Dave said, hardly an athlete and sweating from his brief exertion.

Leona looked down at the manuscript on the coffee table.

"Aw, Stinky, were you looking at your stupid article no one wants to publish?"

"I'm like Galileo—the world isn't ready for my ideas," he replied. Leaning back into the couch cushions, he then said: "Do you really want to hear about my day or can I just ask you about yours?"

"Sure you can."

"How was your day, honey?"

"Lousy. I had a meeting with that Milton guy about consolidating our debts and he kept getting distracted from what he was saying because of my bruise."

"You didn't just tell him the truth?"

"I made the mistake of telling him right off the bat that it was Ian who hit me. *The lady doth protest too much* sort of thing . . . Is it 'dost' or 'doth'?"

"Dost."

Leona paused, thinking for a second, then laughed. "It's *doth* and you know it, mister former English teacher. Anyway, keep your eyes peeled for a pudgy sixty-year-old in a brown suit. I think Mr. Milton wants to have a word with you . . . Sheesh, listen to that," she added, remarking on the grinding of Ian's teeth.

"I'll give him some sugarcane for it, I guess, but he sure doesn't need the calories just before b-e-d."

Snapping a small piece from the shoot balanced on the armrest of the sofa, Dave leaned forward and handed it down to chewed-on fingers that felt like wet rubber. After accepting the piece, Ian reached out and pulled the plug of the television. The parents tensed but he did not yank it again.

"How are you doing there, buddy?" Leona said.

Ian rolled over, smiling. Saliva spilled from the chapped corner of his mouth and swung down to the carpet. He preferred lying on his left and the bald spot on that side of his head now showed in his thin brown hair. His fingers ran over the air like he was playing an invisible harp. His blotchy cheeks pulsed as his molars worked on the sweet cane pulp meant to keep them from grinding together.

"His eyes are half-closed," Leona said.

"I'm sure the gaffer'll drift right off when we put him to bed," Dave joked.

Hearing the word *bed*, Ian let out a menacing howl.

Dave shifted his weight. Leona, who had been leaning against him, adjusted.

“Did you use the blocks today?” she asked.

“Yep. He kept picking yellow ones, so I guess he and I have the same favorite color.”

Dave looked at his watch, then spoke through a yawn: “We need him to want to walk more.”

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**“When they experience Ian’s violent behavior for themselves the doctors can claim he needs to stay in professional care for safety reasons. . . .”**

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Sidling a body-width closer to the sofa, Ian’s shirt front sent up the biting smell of stale apple juice.

The parents enjoyed a moment of quiet. In the adjoining kitchen the refrigerator hummed. The house’s ducts sighed. It was like the moment after waking up but before the alarm clock goes off.

“Guess it’s time.”

Released from Leona’s arms, Dave stood up. At once, Ian began yelping and wailing and throwing his fists in the direction of his father, who grasped him firmly, reaching around the violent hands. He turned his son so he couldn’t kick him and carried him, kicking anyway, up the stairs, bracing when Ian’s foot would catch the handrail and push back.

Orienting himself in the dark as his eyes clutched at the glow of the bedroom’s scuffed Plexiglas window, Dave used his shoulder to flip the light switch on. Multicolored foam was on every wall, the bedframe, and on the door to the empty closet. Ian wriggled and kicked and screamed and pressed outward with his elbows. His jaw set, Dave looked angry, but only because he was concentrating. Leona arrived with fresh folded pajamas but the two found themselves unable to change Ian’s clothes. His diaper was clean; if it weren’t, they would have had to sedate him. There would be no way to get his dental appliance in, so his enamel would grind and grind.

Now more sad than angry, Ian stood in the middle of his room and cried, his eyes narrow red crescents, his open mouth full of chipped, yellow teeth. Leona turned off the light while Dave stood ready in case Ian made a dash for the closing door.

The parents went back downstairs and returned to the sofa.

“You hungry, Leona?”

“I’m starving but let’s wait a bit. We’re too tired to cook.”

“I’ll get something, Honeybun.”

He made to get up but she took his arm.

“It’s endearing how you do chores when you’re tired. When you’re rested you take it easy.”

“That’d be a left-handed compliment if I were ever rested.”

Leona reached and pressed the power button on the remote control; the television’s continued blankness reminded her of how Ian had unplugged it.

In an instant, like a slide flipping in a projector, Dave’s whole bearing changed.

“There are horror stories about whether or not we could bring him home,” he said.

Leona sat up straight.

“Why on earth would they refuse to give him back to us? Lord knows we’ve been anything but negligent. We could get a team of caretakers and friends and relatives to vouch for us and it would have been our decision in the first place. For heaven’s sake, it’s . . .”

Dave raised his palms.

“When they experience Ian’s violent behavior for themselves the doctors can claim he needs to stay in professional care for safety reasons. Supposedly they almost always back off if you have a lawyer call them.”

“So what are the chances of it happening?”

“I was told, ‘pretty slim.’”

Leona’s cheeks and the tip of her nose grew red, the rest of her face pale. Her back was straight and her hands gripped one another.

“So what’s supposed to be two months of therapy could become *forever*?” She paused. “Please just say what it is you want.”

“I’ve said it,” Dave insisted. “I have. Just like with the growth attenuation thing and medicating him even more and all that. I acknowledge it might be better for Ian in the long run and we can’t have him hitting people, but—”

“But what?”

Dave inhaled slowly. His chest rose like water filling a glass.

“I have a preference,” Leona said, before he could answer. “I do.”

“Okay.”

“You have the veto on this because you’re the one at home all day.” She breathed in sharply through her nose. “But I say forget it. I’m not sold on that therapy, first of all, I don’t want to be away from him for two months or risk losing him, second of all . . . and I’m fine. We’re all fine.”

The two glanced thoughtfully about the room as though the significance of what Leona had said was moving over their walls like the cartoon cosmos from Ian’s nightlight.

“No veto from me. I’m glad,” Dave said.

Leona narrowed her eyes, trying to read her husband’s blank face. She chose not to press him further, instead returning to his half of the sofa and nestling up to him as before.

Just like that, life had returned to the way it was.

“We’re all fine,” Leona repeated.

\* \* \*

Soon they were seated at the kitchen table waiting for their food to heat, chatting quietly until the oven timer buzzed. Leona pulled her hands from Dave’s and went over to the counter where the oven mitts were leaning against a stack of sippy cups. After the papery sound of chicken strips shaking loose of the baking sheet in her hands, she heard Dave descending the creaking wooden stairs to their basement.

When he reappeared, dodging Ian’s elaborate wheelchair,

Dave carried a musty stack of coil-bound notebooks of various sizes, black dotted and cobwebbed, warped toward and away from one another. Moldy dust rose as he turned stiffened pages.

“Hang on a sec, hon, some of these are from high school. I’m looking for one of the ones from my undergrad.”

The plastic tablecloth became streaked gray and black as he continued searching for something he once wrote down.

“Ah, here it is. I can’t believe I remembered this and I can’t believe I’ve found it. Here.”

He turned the notebook until it was facing Leona, then lifted his index finger, which had a dotted line of old scars left by Ian’s teeth.

The paragraphs above and below were in black ink, whereas the lines Leona was to read were in blue. The opposite page was covered in mechanical pencil drawings of planetary orbits.

*The line separating truly good people from the rest of us is between those who would raise a disabled child themselves and those who would institutionalize him.*

Leona looked up, her cheeks full of food.

“It was worth going downstairs for,” Dave said, “but it’s obnoxiously pat.”◆

# THE LOVE OF FLYING

PINALBEN “PINKY” PATEL

“It’s karma,” I had been told, growing up. “Poor girl must’ve done something really awful in her past life to deserve this.”

I was born a completely healthy baby at home in one of the tiny villages of Western India. After moving to the United States with my family four years later, my aunt and cousin took me trick-or-treating for the first time. When we got home, my aunt complained that I kept falling down on purpose for attention. Would a four-year-old who began walking at nine months fall just to get mollycoddled? Because of her judgmental attitude, no one took Aunt “Meany” seriously.

Almost a couple years later my kindergarten teacher noticed that I wasn’t placing my feet the way I should when walking. That started the tedious process of testing. The investigation of my diagnosis which began in Lima, Ohio ended in Atlanta, Georgia at Scottish Rite Children’s Hospital. The diagnosis was a genetic, neuromuscular disease called Friedreich’s ataxia.

As the search continued from 1988 through 1992, my walk became more and more drunken-like. At times, it was irritating when I wasn’t able to play on the monkey bars, balance beam, or any other playground equipment requiring the typical childhood precision. But I didn’t let that bother me. I already knew something was wrong with me because of all the hospital visits and being poked and prodded for the last four years. So five months before my eleventh birthday when the name of the condition came, I thought of it as just another name to learn.

My friends of that time never treated me differently because I had a slight slower, wobbly walk—neither in Ohio nor in Georgia. After the diagnosis I had to use a walker, but before my physical therapist could find one my size, the school professionals gave me a baby stroller to use for a couple months. My classmates would help lift the stroller when the wheels got stuck in the mud and into some of my trailer classrooms. If there was any mockery going on behind my back, I didn’t care.

I still needed the walker, which my therapist finally found for me, when my family and I moved back to my hometown in India. My parents did not buy it for me so we left United States without it. Since dad lost his job, we had to leave a couple weeks before my fifth grade graduation. But the school in India started me at the beginning of fourth grade because I had to learn a new language required from the fourth grade.

The good thing about the schools in India is that students don’t have to change classrooms when the bell rings to signal another period. However, my peers were not as willing to help as the ones in the United States. They would be so gracious to help me walk to the bathroom one day, and then the next day they didn’t want anything to do with me.

Three years later, I dropped out of school. Walking, while holding on to stair railings or fellow students had gotten so difficult that I came home with wet pants on many days. Wheelchair access and transportation were not available in India. Besides, writing with

a pencil was getting harder so I was not able to finish my tests on time or copy notes from the blackboard before the bell. There was no homeschooling in India either; thus, I didn't have any choice but to start sitting at home with my sixth grade education.

Homebound, I began thinking I was abnormal. I never thought I was disabled even though family friends and relatives had called me handicapped ever since the diagnosis. When we came back to the United States a couple years later, I reluctantly started school again. (I was put in the ninth grade.) However, I didn't really return to the confident self I had been before I dropped out of school.

I would smile and answer questions, but I didn't strike up conversations or offer my opinion to anyone. I was happy to spend lunch time with my adult aide at school although I did not need her help during the meal. Since she was around me the whole school day, I didn't have friends of my age but that did not frustrate me at all. I was despising myself for having to use a wheelchair.

The same self-hatred went on when we had to move to a different state and another school a year later. Since I began school in the middle of the year when I came back to the United States, this school had to hold me back a year. I was in ninth grade again and being older than my classmates did not help me to open up. Luckily, we didn't move again.

It was a day in the beginning of senior year when nostalgia kicked in. The school system was giving the senior class a retreat to Jonathan Creek Camp for a day. Expecting a typical day of me smiling and watching everyone else have fun, I went on the field trip. But my classmates included me in every activity throughout the day and they even helped push my wheelchair to the restrooms and cafeteria. I remembered the days in Georgia when my little classmates would help me move or lift my walker. As I was reminiscing, my current classmates were getting ready to give me one more surprise.

There was an alpine climbing tower at the camp. I could not imagine being included in that activity. I was grateful for the inclusion I had received so far that day, and I did not mind being left out of that activity. However, the never-say-never cliché is so true! My classmates got together and lifted my 125 pounds of dead weight. I was strapped into a harness and they pulled on the

rope, hoisting me up. I flew in the air with wind swishing around me, my legs dangling below, and feeling the love of my friends.

Karma was never holding me. No, I didn't deserve this degenerating disease, which gave me insulin-dependent diabetes, a pacemaker, auditory neuropathy, optic nerve atrophy, and a slurred voice in addition. But I am not alone. The many others who have it didn't deserve it either. Since that eye-opening day of the retreat, I have done many other things I thought I would never do such as being on the homecoming court, graduating high school, graduating from a university, and writing for various publications.

Last week, my high school principal, who had retired from the job the same year I graduated, invited my friend and me on his boat. I had never been on a pontoon boat before and as it was flying across the lake, wind blowing in my face, I remembered yet again. The reason behind my situation was never karma—it was kismet!♦

# THEN THE PHONE RANG

CAROLE HALL

Small budding leaves had erupted on the red and green maple trees in the yard as Spring threw her hat in the ring and the first rains fell from clouds that resembled cathedrals.

This is California's four year drought. People stopped watering their lawns, watched what they used at shower times and saw on TV the reservoirs so low you could see their dry banks. We also turned off and emptied our water fountain when the Zika virus hit the news. We are after all a desert, a beautiful one, to be sure, but desert nonetheless.

I was in the kitchen of our ranch-style home making mashed potatoes when the phone rang and I saw on the display it was a call from my doctor.

Two days before I'd had a biopsy at the hospital on a lump I'd discovered in my right breast. There were two other lumps, but they had been there for thirty odd years so I thought they obviously were benign or else I'd be long dead by now.

"Your biopsy result just came in," she told me as I held my breath. I'd just started to season and add butter to the steaming heap of potatoes.

"They found cancer and I've made an appointment with an oncologist," I heard her say. Then she gave me the date and time of the appointment.

I know the blood left my face in a rush. CANCER! That awful word that chills you to the bone and you think, *Am I going to die now?*

My mother was just forty-nine when cancer took away her life and it looked like—or so I thought—I had inherited the cancer gene from her.

But let me back up a bit. I had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis at age thirty-eight. Not a bad case, just mostly affecting my legs. But I continued to go to work in Los Angeles at the airport, catching the bus every morning for my 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. shift as reservationist at the Sheraton Hotel.

Although I became tired too soon in the evenings and usually sought the comfort of my bed earlier than most, I got on with life, enjoying the brief respites when I could almost walk naturally. Life has its ups and downs.

Then I broke my right ankle at work, slipping on the desk floor mat, and wound up with a cast and on disability. One of the downs just mentioned.

It was at this time my friend, Cristel, also diagnosed with MS, suggested we move from Los Angeles to Northern California. Almost as if it was all written in the "book of life," we should take advantage of this situation and get the heck out! The steel and concrete of LA and the bumper-to-bumper traffic was a deciding factor to actually change our lives and do something else. We knew someone at the throat of wine country, so on a day filled with sunshine we packed the last of our belongings, waved good-bye to the City of Angels and changed our lives.

Now came this phone call from my doctor causing dread to fill every pore I possessed and making my heart hammer so hard I could hear it. There it was. Cancer—rearing its ugly head and it was in ME.

The oncologist told me I was slated for a radical mastectomy so I looked up a video of the procedure on my iPad. Oddly enough I wasn't afraid. If they have to cut off a breast to stop the nasty thing then okay, I've got another one after all. Breast I mean.

At this time I was deep into writing my novel, *Nairobi Bloodstar*. I like to write and publish my short stories and novels. After all it's something to do while my friend works, she's a massage therapist.

Then the surgery day arrived. At the hospital operating theater I was actually talking to the anesthesiologist telling him not to inject me with the drug that killed Michael Jackson, when a voice in my right ear said, "You can wake up now, your surgery is over."

The actual surgery took two hours. Then I was wheeled, totally pain free, back to the ward for an overnight stay. Every few hours a nurse woke me up to take my vitals, but it was great to see my friend come and fetch me at discharge time and to go home to my cats and my own bed. I had a massive bandage secured with metal staples on my chest for two weeks of healing.

The final PET scan from skull to mid-thigh came back clear. No chemo or radiation and the surgeon was overheard to say, "She'll die of old age before she dies of cancer." Only three lymph nodes were affected out of the seven removed.

Then I began to feel life was pretty darn good. My book was coming along just great. When I finished it a publisher accepted it almost immediately. I was a legitimate writer, by god! Really. Thank you, angel spirit.

The day came when I held my own book in my hands. I'd overcome multiple sclerosis and breast cancer to write a novel and do something with my life. Be someone. Make a difference. And I had.

It's now almost eighteen months since my breast cancer surgery and I feel fine, better than fine, I've accomplished something and I'm still here.

We have a new cat named Angel. After fostering her, we brought her home as a small kitten to let her sleep on our chests until she got too big. We found her to be as delightful, loving animal as you could ask for.

Just this morning on my iPad there was a message telling me my third novel had been accepted for publication. Cancer didn't get its claws in me. I'm here, producing, living, and enjoying life for as long as God lets me.

That's how it should be. Someone once said, and I forget who the quote belongs to: "Do something remarkable with your life, otherwise why are you here at all?"

I'm still trying. ♦

HANNAH CARMACK

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## OF THE THINGS I MISS

A pizza with my dad on Wednesday nights, garlic cups that come at an additional cost but are worth the extra 40¢, the boundless freedom of a full tank of gas, the alien hospital room, nurses that say I'm beautiful, and train rides to the city. Short walks around the neighborhood, bike rides that went on for hours, hand jobs that lasted from my place to yours, birthday cake, long trips to see my mother, the domesticity of our favorite place, and the respect of my coworkers. Lace underwear, an easy A, a perfect attendance award. My brothers. My mother. The simplicity of a new relationship. The interconnectivity in a group of strong women. Nights in the basement of a good friend. My friends' mothers. The isolation and togetherness of three very alone people. An "I love you." with no complications. Fertility, thick hair that doesn't thin at the scalp, Cajun chicken pasta. My mother's sharp mind and her firm honesty. Pains that are just pains, stomach aches that are just stomach aches: I miss you more than almost anything. But not as much as I miss the way things looked when I was healthy.

*An earlier version of this poem was published in The Cadaverine literary journal in May 2016. Reprinted with permission of the author.*

RANDY MARTIN

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## a time before ptsd

I often look back and wish I could  
Have been Buddy  
the dog I had as a kid

Buddy unaware of the things we  
couldn't mention;  
the war, daddy's

unspoken reason as to why he was  
missing parts of two  
fingers or had just the

one working eye; unable to see  
the ludicrousness  
of fear that blinded his

reason which always ran away  
when a plane with  
its prop cut anxious

air, or why he made mother drive  
through pilot-car  
construction sites,

father leaning forward with his  
hands on his ears,  
rocking and biting

back at the backhoe d-d-d-d-d-  
destroying the road  
with its jackhammer

attachment; Buddy in the back-  
seat, cowering too,  
Buddy not forced 50

years later to watch his Old Man  
slowly flake away  
in an Old Folks Home

of unfamiliar, his unspoken fears  
having grown larger  
alongside the ivy of

Alzheimer's that has strangled  
out everything but  
the Buddy and the war;

I his eldest son feeling as apathetic  
as an adult as he  
was with me, a son

not at all ready to throw the white  
flag of peace and  
surrender as I struggle

to crush in my own silence after  
each of my visits  
the hard to wash guilt

from not having tried harder to be  
close to my dad;  
wanting nothing else

now but that last  
chance to be

close to  
my dad.

**Cherie Bowers** teaches students with learning differences. Her poems, short stories, and articles have appeared in a number of publications. She says, “I write because I’m never sure how anything will end.”

**Hannah Carmack** has had two books published by Nine Star Press, *Take Your Medicine* (March 2018) and *Seven-Sided Spy* (January 2018). Two of her poems appeared in *The Fictional Café*, an online journal. Carmack has ulcerative colitis. She says, “I think addressing disability in my work is necessary in normalizing it.”

**Peg Daniels’** work has appeared in *Blood Orange Review* (May 2018) and *New Mobility* (February 2010). Daniels has chronic fatigue syndrome and says, “If not for CFS, I would never have been a writer . . . . And if not for my husband’s accident, I probably wouldn’t have written about disability issues, especially my own, still hard to gain emotional distance from it.”

**Susan Duke** is a writer from Illinois. Her fiction has appeared in *Indiana Voice Journal* (January 2014), *The Chaffin Journal* (August 2014), *Whetstone* (December 2014), and *Pennsylvania Literary Journal* (December 2016). Duke worked with children with special needs for thirty years.

**F. I. Goldhaber** is a poet and storyteller. As a reporter and business writer, she produced features and editorials for newspapers, corporations, governments, and nonprofits. Now more than forty-five venues have published her poetry, books, and essays.

**Craig R. Gralley** is a former analyst for the Central Intelligence Agency. His nonfiction articles have appeared in *Studies in Intelligence* (CIA’s scholarly journal, March 2017), *The Washington Post* (October 2013), and *Elan Magazine* (numerous artist interviews including one in April 2018). His book *Hall of Mirrors—The True Story of Virginia Hall. How a Disabled Woman from Baltimore Became America’s First and Greatest Spy of the Second World War*, is due to be published in February 2019. Gralley has an eighty percent hearing loss in his left ear due to a bout with meningitis at age two.

**Carole Hall** “loves to pull stories out of the air.” She has had short stories appear in *The Literary Nest* (February 2018). Her two novels were both published by Melange Books, *Nairobi Bloodstar* (April 2015) and *Killing at the White Swan Inn* (May 2017). Hall is a native of the United Kingdom. She has multiple sclerosis.

**Alan Harris** has been a hospice volunteer for twenty years and says, “I welcome the opportunity to help channel their life-stories into poetry and narratives of all genres.” Harris was the recipient of the 2014 John Clare Poetry Award and the 2015 Tompkins Award in Poetry from Wayne State University. His chapbook, *Hospice Bed Conversations* (Finishing Line Press, July 2017) has been nominated for a Midland Author’s Award.

**Barbara Hosbach’s** articles have appeared in *U.S. Catholic* (May 2015), and *St. Anthony Messenger* (July 2009 and December 2014). She has two nonfiction books on spirituality published by Franciscan Media (2012) and Paulist Press (2014). Hosbach received second place in the Catholic Press Association Best Essay, National General Interest Magazine competition. She has multiple sclerosis and says, “I’ve loved writing since I was seven years old and learned to form words on a page.”

**Feliks Jezioranski** is a frequent book reviewer for the Toronto-based “mega-zine,” *Broken Pencil*. His story, “Lines in a Notebook,” was inspired in part by his cousin who has severe autism. He says, “I write because I love people and I think inventing stories is the best way to figure them out.”

**Amy Lefkof** is working on her M.F.A. in creative writing from Queens University in Charlotte, North Carolina. Her work has appeared in Southern Methodist University’s *Women’s and Gender Studies* (Spring 2015), *Tiferet* (Summer 2017), and *Jewish War Veterans of the United States* (Spring 2018). She believes “people’s stories matter.”

**A. Z. Louise’s** poems have appeared in *Wizards in Space Literary Magazine* (July 2016) and *Strange Horizons* (June 2018). She contributed a short story to *EOM: Equal Opportunity Madness, A Mythos Anthology*, published by Otter Libris (August 2017). Louise has bipolar disorder and ADHD.

**Sheila Luna** is a graduate program manager in the department of English at Arizona State University. Her nonfiction articles have appeared in *Longridge Review* (January 2017), *bioStories magazine* (January 2016), *Spry Literary Journal* (June 2015), and *PILGRIM: A Journal of Catholic Experience* (November 2014). Luna was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis at the age of fifteen. She shares, “Living with RA has given me the ability to focus on the small things that give joy to life . . . . Gratitude is key.”

**Randy Martin** graduated from Northwest Community College in 2004. He works as a carpenter and also writes poetry. His work was published in *MUSE Literary Journal* (2015). Regarding disability, Martin believes that most people feel, “Thank God that is not me . . . but what if it was?”

**William H. McCann, Jr.** earned his M.A. from University of Kentucky in 2012. He is a teacher, writer, editor, and publisher. He wrote a memoir that appeared in *Kentucky Magazine*. He is the editor of two books—*Kentucky Theatre Yearbook* and *I Come From: A Voices Inside Anthology*, both published by JW Books. Growing up, McCann dealt with severe learning disabilities.

**John Maxwell O'Brien** is an emeritus professor of ancient and medieval history at Queens College (New York). He's published numerous articles on history and alcoholism and a celebrated biography of Alexander the Great (Routledge) which has been translated into Greek and Italian. He is presently writing fiction and poetry. His first yet to be published novel, *Aloysius the Great* (set in England during the turbulent '60s) was a winner in the *Writers Advice* 2018 Scintillating Starts Contest. "Singing Sammy's Song" is dedicated to his nephew, Thomas J. Quinn III.

**Sandy Palmer** studied graphic design at The University of Akron and is a freelance artist who works with a variety of media. She contributes to *Kaleidoscope* as the writer of visual artist profiles, having joined the staff as art coordinator in 2002. Palmer is the full-time graphic design specialist at United Disability Services.

**Pinalben "Pinky" Patel** is a native of India. Her first novel, *Caste Aside*, is available as a Kindle edition from Amazon. Patel's disability is Friedreich's ataxia which causes nerve damage, muscle weakness, and loss of function. She says, "My passion for writing stems from the fact that I was raised in a culture where I was never allowed to have my own say. I love raising awareness about my disability and culture."

**Nancy Scott** of Pennsylvania has contributed to the anthologies, *Staring Back* (1997) and *Cup of Comfort* (2002 and 2003) as well as the journal, *Disabilities Studies Quarterly* (2005 and 2015). Scott received the International Onkyo Award (World Braille Essay Contest) in 2009. She collaborated with artist Maryann Riker to create two chapbooks, *The Nature of Beyond* (2010) and *The Almost Abecedarian* (2015). Her essays and poems have appeared in *Braille Forum*, *One Sentence Poems*, *Philadelphia Stories*, *Pentimento*, and *Wordgathering*.

**Monica Shah** was born in London and grew up in various small towns in the United Kingdom, Africa, India, and the United States. A former science teacher, her writing often explores identity, culture, society, and nature. Her poetry has appeared in magazines and journals such as *Chaya*, *Talent in Motion*, *Three Drops from a Cauldron*, *Edison Literary Review*, and in the anthology *Bolo Bolo*.

**Gail Willmott** has been a staff member with *Kaleidoscope* since 1982 and became editor-in-chief in July, 2003. She received both her bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Illinois. "This is a career I have loved for thirty-six years—getting to know our contributors as well as working with very accomplished and supportive colleagues." This is her last completed issue as editor-in-chief before retiring in August 2018.

**Laura Yeager** writes about mental health, surviving cancer, and spirituality. As a blogger, her work appears frequently at "Psych Central" and "Cure Today." She teaches online creative writing at Gotham Writers' Workshop and composition at Kent State University. Yeager says, "My mental health issues (bipolar disorder) have given me empathy and a great deal to write about."



Jeff Hanson, *Somewhere in St. Lucia*, 2018,  
acrylic on textured canvas, 12" x 48"

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