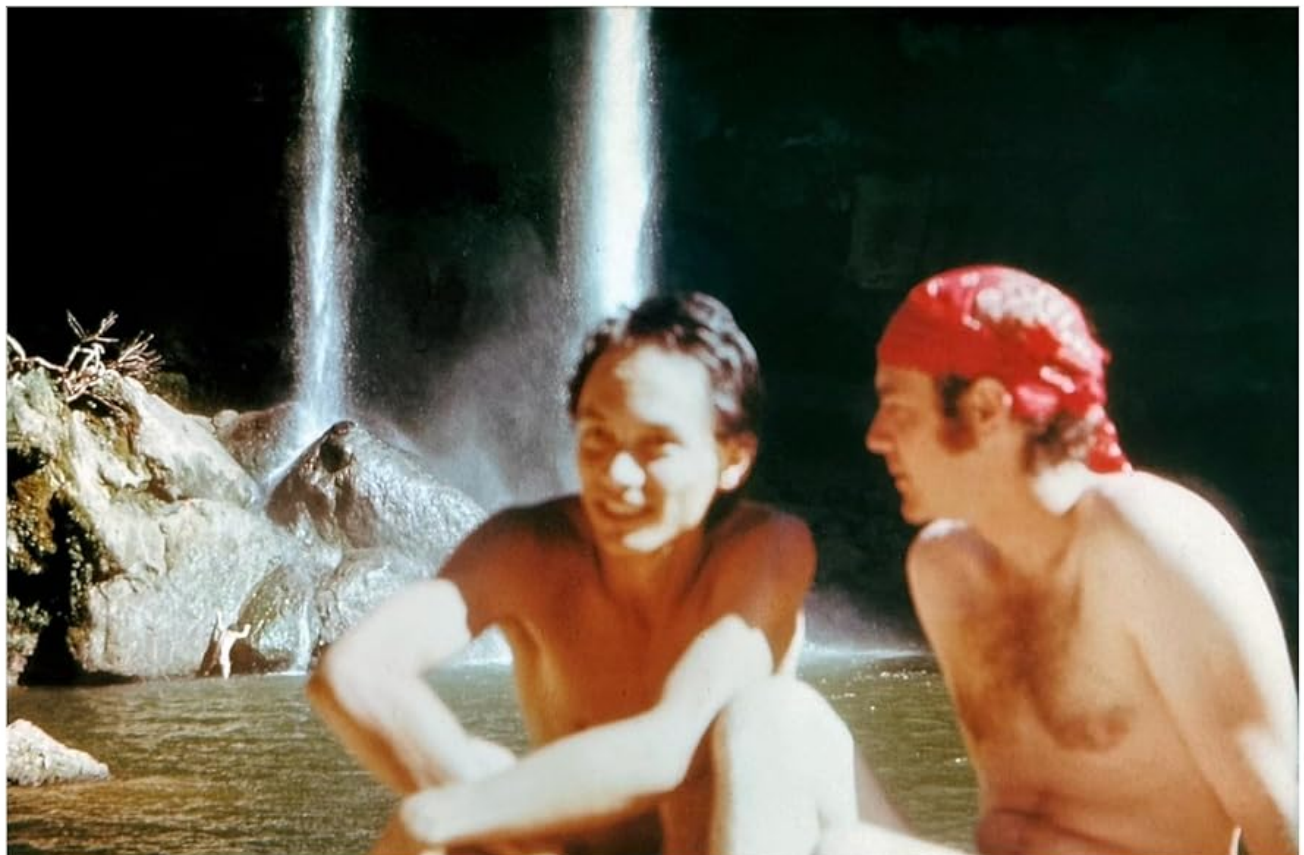


ROBERT GLÜCK

ABOUT ED



About Ed

ROBERT GLÜCK

 **New York Review Books** New York

This is a New York Review Book

published by The New York Review of Books

207 East 32nd Street, New York, NY 10016

www.nyrb.com

Copyright © 2023 by Robert Glück

All rights reserved.

Cover image: Bob and Ed in Palenque, 1974; courtesy of Robert Glück

Cover design: Katy Homans

Inside covers: Ed Aulerich-Sugai, Kohada Koheiji 3, mixed media on paper, 1989

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Glück, Robert, 1947– author.

Title: About Ed / by Robert Glück.

Description: New York City : New York Review Books [2023]

Identifiers: LCCN 2023012401 (print) | LCCN 2023012402 (ebook) | ISBN 9781681377766 (paperback) | ISBN 9781681377773 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Glück, Robert, 1947– —Relations with men. | Aulerich, Edward. | Authors, American—20th century—Biography. | Gay authors—United States—20th century—Biography. | Asian American artists—20th century—Biography. | Gay artists—United States—20th century—Biography. | AIDS (Disease)—Patients—United States—Biography. | LCGFT: Autobiographies.

Classification: LCC PS3557.L82 Z46 2023 (print) | LCC PS3557.L82 (ebook) | DDC 813/.54 [B]—dc23/eng/20230328

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023012401>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023012402>

ISBN 978-1-68137-777-3

v1.0

For a complete list of titles, visit www.nyrb.com

Contents

Cover
Title Page
Copyright and More Information
Contents

EVERYMAN

Mac, March 1985
Denny
Nonie
Ed, October 14, 1987
Nonie's Map
Everyman

ABOUT ED

Ed and the Movies, 1989
A False Step, March 1990
Notes for a Novel Notes for a Novel
Ed's Tomb
Nonie in Excelsis, July 1991
Ed's First Sexual Experience, June 1967
Haircut, July 1992
Middle Child, February 1993
Notes for a Novel
October 1993
Bob and Ed, November 1993
Question with a Question
The Earth Is Full
Die with the Living, Live with the Dead, February 13, 1994
Open in All Dimensions
The Moon Is Brighter Than the Sun
Notes for a Novel

Ed and I Attend a Josef von Sternberg Retrospective in 1972 at a Theater on
Eighteenth Street in the Castro That Disappeared Long Ago

Ed's Things

Notes for a Novel

False Knowledge

Bisexual Pussy-Boy

INSIDE

Acknowledgments

Biographical Note

About Ed

Everyman

for George Stambolian

Mac

MARCH 1985

I WAS ALREADY twenty minutes late. I had *made* myself late, following the minute hand in a loose reverie while my breath fanned mint into my head. I was shaved and dressed, longing for some memory or plan. I rose from the twisted sheets and looked out. Mac's window was empty and so were the sidewalks on both sides of Clipper. Lily and I ran downstairs. We dashed to the corner and onto the median strip that divides Dolores. She sniffed the grass, then dropped into the gentle curtsy female dogs make when they piss. We crossed back at full speed; Mac stood on the sidewalk in front of my house. "C'mere, Bob." Lily ran ahead to greet him.

Mac was trembling. All winter he'd postponed going in for tests. "I'm going in but am I coming out?" He wet his lips and stared up Clipper at the rosy horizon. For a moment his face inhabited the light and the peaceful air. I consoled myself—Yes, yes, half an hour late, so what? Cars passed and continued up into the sunset where drivers lost definition and cars lurched and decided with lives of their own, but weak ones.

"Ed's sick too."

"That so?" Mac raised his hand to the back of his neck in sympathy, the gesture's small wind laden with witch hazel. When I say his face inhabited the sky, I scoop out space so my drama has its theater. Mac couldn't be distracted from the sky's larger court. Lily sat in front of him, so alert she drew closer without changing position, big apricot ears tipped forward, beige tail broadly sweeping the sidewalk behind.

Mac lowered himself painfully to my porch step. For a long moment the sky without sun remained pure blue, then it subsided. "Aw, don't give me that you're too busy." Lily reseated herself directly in front of Mac, eyes beseeching, big tongue lolling. He absentmindedly drew dog biscuit after dog biscuit from a jacket pocket crammed with them. His joints were swollen so he lifted the biscuits lightly with two fingers. He held each one up; it drew Lily's eyes prayerfully. Half the cars had their headlights on.

Mac looked up with raised eyebrows and an open mouth as though I'd interrupted him with startling news. When I remained silent he said, "I'll tell you something, Bob. I went to the Castro Theatre last night and I did not even

recognize myself in the mirror in the lobby till I moved.” Now I was surprised, as though Mac occurred in the present for the first time. His sudden arrival pushed me backward. I became so tired I actually heard voices squabbling in my dream.

Mac emptied one pocket and started on the other. The biscuits were shaped like the cross section of a bone, the marrow a dark maroon. “I could see myself move,” he added. “I’m not that far gone.” Mac despised the drama that makes unique gestures, but he was wavering, losing his bearings. I wondered if he had ever recognized his body. It retained an applicable quality from his younger days. Short and nimble, it climbed a ladder to fix a window or paint the garage door white. Now it was a foreign vehicle, Saab or Toyota. Lily tenderly freed each biscuit from his fingers with the tips of her teeth, then chewed with head lowered and lips drawn back as though concentrating.

Mac was completely recognizable to me: his white hair and stiff part and shiny black shoes and his street and his biscuits. His sidewalk was still wet—he’d hosed it down. An old man with bright blue eyes. Lily wouldn’t budge until she was certain his pockets were empty; she glanced back with disbelief when I prodded her. They united against me, the White Rabbit whose schedules and appointments diminish life. When the party was over Mac got to his feet and Lily climbed the first stair. It was as far as she could go on her own. I clasped my hands under her belly to lift her rump and we started up together. “Hey Bob, hope someone carries *my* hind end upstairs when I’m as old as your daughter.”

I ran Lily up and threw a handful of kibble in her bowl. She disregarded it, her senses pitched upward in anticipation. She nudged the air toward the door with her snout to increase her chances. When I avoided her eye, her joy faded and she dropped into a corner. She brought her bushy tail around so she could smell her fur and declined to raise her eyes when I said goodbye.

“C’mere Bob, I got a shirt in my trunk for you.”

“I’m in a hurry, Mac.” But he was already on his way. I followed him into the dusk, pleading, “Why don’t you wear it?”

He looked over his shoulder, not as far as my face. “Oh, I can’t use it now.”

He put the package in my hands. By the light in his trunk, I saw a blue dress shirt folded inside its cardboard-and-plastic box: “—— from Sears.” He turned back to his trunk. “And these pajamas. Now wait a minute. You don’t wear pajamas.” We looked over at my bright window, then up at his dark

one. I lowered my gaze to the spectator who cried in dismay, “I don’t understand what you and Denny got going between you!” He actually waited for me to reply. I was gearing up when he continued, “You both leave the garbage cans on the street. You walk right by them. It’s happened a dozen times. Let me tell you, that might be fine when there’s no wind to speak of—I’ve seen lids roll clear down to Church when it’s rainy and windy outside.”

Mac closed his trunk, closing the subject of the garbage and my nakedness. He waved me on in disgust.

• • •

Mac had a waking dream that his body was hiding from him in the red lobby of the Castro. A few days later his wife, Nonie, told me Mac was in the hospital with cancer in both lungs. Still, I looked for him when I stepped outside. He’d sat on an aluminum tube chair on the sidewalk, weed killer in the cracks, uniting in himself our corner of the world. The garage behind him stood for economy and conservation; it smelled of paint and clean concrete. On the back wall he’d built a shelf for the orderly tool chest, a stack of yellow Pennzoil cans, and a green hose coiled around itself; on the floor, sand soaked up a blue-brown oil stain at its own pace. Elsewhere a city exploded and fire rained down, but here on hot days Lily sat with Mac in the shade of the overhead door, and neighbors stopped and talked as though his garage were the courthouse. I felt the romance of accord between a municipality and its citizens. The town square makes citizens, and they like to sit, consider, and mingle their stories with the present.

A few weeks before, Mac dialed me a wake-up call at eight. I rolled out of bed. “Thank you, Mac.” I’d set the alarm for eight thirty; I think Mac was afraid I’d miss my eleven o’clock flight and blow his trip to the airport. What if you don’t want someone to phone when the mail arrives, your tire is low, the police are ticketing, or garbage day comes? Mac provided such insistent Samaritanship that sometimes I felt exploited. We drove in his perfect blue Dodge, in its microclimate of witch hazel. It was Mac, not Nonie, who wore scent, who needed acknowledgment. Mac related a number of highway disasters witnessed by Nonie and himself. This was a strangely reassuring lullaby—his belief that the exact circumstances of death have value. We were driving down San Jose Avenue where it becomes a delicious canyon whose sides are retaining walls higher than the sketchy eucalyptus, the canyon

bridged by walkways across the narrow sky with its bright clouds.

His landlord had just replaced the old double-hung wooden windows with ugly aluminum ones, and in the car Mac rejoiced. He praised them as unselfconsciously as a Greek chorus—thrift, conservation, he spoke from the darkness of those qualities. Then Mac asked, “Notice anything different?”

His face tipped back with sly expectation. Small men often seem flirtatious. I had an uncomfortable sexual moment. A black asphalt road curved upward, a light-gray concrete curb, a white metal railing, a few agapanthus, a few mock orange trees from bureaucracy’s arboretum: the definition of nothing to see. I felt slightly hysterical to be considering it. “Mac, it’s the San Bruno on-ramp to 280.”

“They trimmed the trees. Things seem different, you don’t know what it is—sure enough, they trimmed the trees.” I’d say it was Mac’s ability to tame the arbitrary by training on it the ecstasy of his surprise. He rescued Clipper Street—me with the others—by willing our lives into meaning, however incomplete. The corner market, the neighborhood *Progress*: the meagerness of these gods only displayed the intensity of his faith. I was not in his league.

On 280 we dropped into valleys of white fog and emerged in broad daylight. Mac needed some information to purvey back on Clipper. On the way I told him where I was going and when I would return, and about Denny’s trip to Denver for his grandmother’s birthday, Stanley’s visit, and Lily’s trip to the Russian River.

• • •

His comb raked dull blond furrows from his sharp part.

He sat on my steps when the sun left his side of the street. His big neck stood sore and naked.

Lily languished by the window as though she were calling his name. When he appeared in his window, she moaned.

He had a limp—he’d worked at the docks and had taken a bad fall. Ed sees an old man falling off a ladder because Mac was on one so often, but I think he fell from the deck of a freighter.

I asked him if he was in the union. “Aw, they were just trouble-makers.”

He disliked the boyfriends of our women neighbors. “That Frank is a real Jew.”

I lowered the trunk lid on my Toyota. “Mac, you know I’m Jewish.” I

found that hard to say. I was barred from the moment, no longer one with the day and the street. His insult was homegrown, but it also seemed exotic, like fascist demons in movies. Had Mac despised me all along? Had I provoked him?—by condescending from the vantage of class?—by forcing him to represent the past? Was he asking for more attention?

“Aw, that’s not what I mean.” He shrugged with exasperation. We saw each other as unwilling and limited. I’d thought of Mac as a master of ephemera, a novelist like me who worked outside the medium; he was bigoted, meddlesome, and loose-tongued, with a gossip’s contempt for his neighbors. And me? I wanted my community romance intact. I wanted nothing new from Mac. *Good fences make good neighbors* could describe our inner lives. So Mac and Nonie make idle chitchat from racial insults over dinner in their yellow kitchen. I didn’t want to witness the disjunction between Mac’s speech, his actual life, and the romance I invented for us.

• • •

It took me a week to visit Mac in the hospital—a week in March 1985. During that time 70,000 people applied for 150 postal jobs, Reagan likened the U.S.-backed Contras in Nicaragua to our founding fathers, and six were drowned when a tugboat sank north of San Francisco. Pharmaceutical firms scrambled for the profits from the new AIDS blood test, the Dow surged 15.35 points to a record high, and an earthquake killed at least eighty-two on Chile’s coast.

Iran bombed Baghdad, AIDS fears rose among embalmers, and an Iowa man won a restraining order to stop his ex-fiancée from having an abortion. Haitian Vodou priests doubted that Swiss pharmacists could make a zombie —“They have a long way to go.” The woman had the abortion anyway and a gay man testified that a San Francisco policeman maced, kicked, and choked him, yelling “You deserve to die!” Fifteen people were killed by lightning in Zimbabwe, evidence of atrocities committed by the Contras took center stage in Congress, and Soviet President Chernenko died.

A Berkeley radio station interviewed Charles Manson, 93,000 midsize farms were going broke, and Gorbachev became president of the Soviet Union. Interferon stopped the AIDS virus in test tubes, and doctors who implanted a baboon’s heart in Baby Fae overstated her chance for survival. Nonie said I would have to sneak past the nurses to visit Mac. I was creeping

along a lime-green wall by the second nurses' station, averting my eyes, when I realized they didn't care at all. A Chinese nurse leaned against the counter, a jolly audience for the seated women who laughed with excitement and called, "Ireeeen . . . Ireeeen . . ." They were some impediment Nonie had invented; without remorse, she had pretty much stopped going.

Mac's room was dim. I stopped in my tracks. Two nurses, young Chicanas, stood on either side of him. One cradled his head against her shoulder and moved a white cloth over his arm. The other gazed up at his IV with a solemn expression. I was shocked by his blunt nakedness, his smooth wiry body. His legs and thighs looked fresh. His hands lay open on either side of his luminous torso. His eyes were fixed, but when he caught sight of me he modestly averted them. I had not meant to see anything so personal, and I felt a pang of anxiety as the borders of our friendship shifted. I retreated to the hall.

One nurse asked, "Mr. McMillan, are you comfortable now?"

"I know where I'd be more comfortable."

"Just a little while longer."

The other nurse echoed, "Just a little while."

I drew a chair up to his bed. A knot or splinter on the inseam of my jeans irritated the skin of my inner thigh with every move. "You look good, Mac." I sided with the stupid philodendron in its bid for normalcy, undermined by stainless steel buttons, C and D, on the wall behind it. Mac was hooked up to an IV, only that—no tubes, blood, or respirator. He received no therapy, yet I treated him as though he were recovering. In the hall someone whistled inside the echo of his own whistling, someone with soft shoes walked down the corridor calling "Jackie, Jackie, Jackie . . ." The air was empty to breathe and papery, but crowded with dings of elevator arrivals, squeaks of carts and gurneys, deep coughing and clatter of dishes, doctors' names paged, names that could never be understood, summarizing the anxiety of illness. The lack of stimulation made me sleepy and hungry for sensation. When I closed my eyes a slice of pecan pie bled amber syrup on a Melmac plate.

Mac rose to the challenge: faced with the annihilation of particulars, he organized his part of the abyss. He pointed to the nurses' station across the hall. "See that gal, Bob, that's Maria, she's got a sister in Fresno who . . ." The trouble was not on my pants but on my leg, a pimple or rash or ingrown hair—I longed to go home and see what had appeared on my skin.

Mac was telling me about Maria's sister. His rambling story replaced the

subject of his death. Mac believed in the value of Maria's sister's experience in Fresno because knowledge was an end in itself. His solidarity was consoling because it was faith in the value of everyone's life. Then again, maybe I was consoled by Mac's inability to locate a frantic loneliness in himself.

You go along and something's different. The second time I visited, it was apparent that Mac was dying. He had already started, his body was stuttering, losing integrity. I had seen this stuttering once before but had forgotten. I held his hand and he covered mine with his other, then held up all three hands to show how swollen his fingers were. I couldn't make out what he was saying. I could tell he was loaded by the way his irises dropped to the corners of his eyes when he rolled his head. There was a sense of dangerous speeding, time as space, like speeding over the ground as the airplane descends, when just a moment before in the air we seemed almost motionless. Mac was out of time, whispering. Then with perfect composure he asked, "Bob, do you know my mother's number?" When I didn't reply he said, "Why don't you let me drive you home?" His blue eyes were bright with conspiracy; he cocked his head on the pillow.

"I'll come visit you again."

"Hope you find me here." He frowned at the ceiling and asked, "Is that your luggage?" When I turned to go he added, "Take care of yourself, Bob." The words gave me a little push. Mac always took care of everything. "Wait," he said. In time or space?

I doubt they did "everything they could." Mac didn't expect that kind of care. He followed the prescribed behavior with a conviction that resembled faith in an afterlife, which doesn't give much to the dying except to structure the experience of death. Mac's illness existed for the hospital, his death belonged to the nurses and doctors and the world beyond.

• • •

Mac's service was held at Reilly Company, a neighborhood mortuary at the bottom of Dolores, gone now. Two plump businessmen stood chatting in the sunlight on the corner with all the time in the world. The gray building was vaguely Italianate, with ponderous brackets and rusticated stucco. Small cypresses grew in stone tubs on either side of the grand portal. A man in a black-and-blue uniform stood inside the door; he was so fat and pigeon-toed

that his arms swung around when he waded forward the few steps to point the way. The space for death was an old-fashioned parlor—framed mirrors, green drapes, a floral-tapestry sofa, two torchères with candles of electric bulbs, and a grandfather clock.

I entered the chapel just as Mac's service ended. It was a small gathering, although Mac knew a hundred neighbors, and his works of mercy took him to other parts of town. "Bob, c'mere," and we'd be hauling scrap wood for the potbellied stove of an ancient couple who lived on a hill in a tiny earthquake cabin. The chapel emptied; Nonie approached, hunched forward in grief. She cried "Oh Bob" and her small body fell against mine like a slight breeze. We had never touched. I felt tremendous latitude, that anything short of dying would be appropriate. I laughed as though we were meeting at a party. Nonie looked confused, then fell into other arms.

I was stopped short by Mac in his big casket. Now I felt like an intruder. Mac was always so prim; he never broke the social contract except by dying. His cheeks were apple red as though he were ashamed to be in that position.

Denny

“LOOK AT THIS, sweetie.” I showed him a forgotten document found while hunting for checks in my top desk drawer. It was an agenda we had drawn up for a Saturday night long ago. Our evenings were still filled with meetings—the left wing of SEIU, BAGL (Bay Area Gay Liberation), Enola Gay (nuclear proliferation). The agenda was written in pencil on typing paper soft with age; it proposed categories and subcategories, beginning “Item One: Warm-Up Kisses and Music a) Denny wants 20th C. b) Bob wants 18th C.,” and ending “Item Twelve: Pillow Talk.” “Look at all the things we used to do,” I marveled. We read silently the amazing access blocked off for the duration. “I forgot we did them.” We glimpsed a lost horizon.

“Oh Bob,” Denny said, a modest virgin. He reorganized us on the sofa. He sat face forward, his limbs so slight they resembled a marionette’s. I reclined with my feet on his lap and I considered his bony eloquent profile. On the carpet Lily slept deep in the blond nest of her body, dazed by extreme age and arthritis medicine. Denny sipped clear liquid that broke into metallic greenness on his tongue and juniper in his nostrils. He furrowed his square brow and cocked his head in an attitude of considering and raised his glass, an outsize triangle on a stem, a shape so simple it might have been neon above a bar. “Nectar of the gods, *mon ami*.”

I raised my glass to the martini maker. “The modernist cocktail.” We drank from that utopian wellspring and browsed through *Architectural Digest*. The cost of the magazine was an extravagance, but we considered entire homes that were stylish blunders or myths of habitation, tried them on like new hats. A glazed chintz, silver peonies drifting on grassy green—the brief entertainment of lifting a flower to your nose—would it be right for this room? We saw ourselves against a panorama, climbing to the true global village. The flagstone terraces, heavy pages, and paneled bedrooms were a voluptuous garden without soil, the only home we ever pictured sharing. The gin gave the future we assembled a certain credence.

Our game was so retro. Above our acted-out feelings—retro, neo, post, and pseudo—arched a rainbow of pleasure. Denny curbed my taste for the ornate. Our love was predicated on convivial sex, validation, the luxury of shared

assumptions, and an impulse to corrupt by creating new desires in each other. I wanted a Pompeian frieze above the picture rail. I looked up prayerfully, but Denny cautioned, “Pure of line, Bob. Look at this.” He showed me a transom window, a fan of glass above a paneled mahogany door. “Clarity above an obstacle.”

“You know, I’m worried about Ed.”

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“Intestinal things.”

“Oh Bob, Ed always thinks he’s sick.”

“Ed says, ‘The pain is under my fifth rib and feels orange,’ and the doctor starts shouting.”

“Is he worried about AIDS?”

“Ugh. He stopped long before we did. Isn’t it strange that you and I gave up all the unsafe sex on our agenda, even though the viral horse would have already left our barn?”

“It’s your cow and your barn door and your horse and your stable door. That’s ideology for you, *mon ami*. When is Mac’s funeral?”

“Last Thursday. The service wasn’t announced and Nonie kept it to herself. It started at twelve on the dot and lasted till twelve fifteen. A third of the mourners missed it trying to park. I came in at the tail end and you know—there was Mac. He still looked interested.” We sat with our drinks. I thought, No, it’s Ed’s awareness of death in the midst of life that aroused me and that made doctors recoil, negating them as it does. The sudden friendship with a corpse shocked me. Mac was a ledge to jump off. I hadn’t meant to see anything so alien. Nothing nothing nothing is more unlikely—not hell or rising from the dead or bardo states or the Isles of the Blessed—nothing is more fantastic than for someone you love to stop, just stop, and be lowered into a hole and covered with concrete and actual dirt.

“Cremation’s the revenge,” Denny said, “but you don’t have the sense the person died. All these memorials and no body. I miss Mac. I wish I’d visited him in the hospital.”

“He died in three weeks. Lily still waits by his gate.” Lily’s ears tipped forward, though her eyes didn’t open. Then she slowly climbed onto her legs.

Denny called, “Lily?”

I sang, “Hey baby, where you been all night? Your hair’s all mussed up and your clothes don’t fit you right.” She licked her chops thickly and surveyed us without interest. Then she walked away and a moment later we

heard lapping in the kitchen.

“It took Mary-Madeleine two years to die of lung cancer. Her daughters chose a beach north of Santa Cruz.”

Denny leaned back, miming boredom.

“She was in a box wrapped in gold foil. The ashes were actually thick flakes and bone meal. I took a handful and walked down, trying to be free.”

Mary-Madeleine was as new to her mid-seventies as I was to my mid-thirties; she had freely scattered unfinished poems, unraised children and their dads. “I threw her out to sea, but wind caught her ashes and threw them back in my face, and Mary-Madeleine went right up my nose and into my eyes. I was so blinded I had to kneel. I probably have some of her lodged inside my lungs.”

“A walking urn,” Denny said.

• • •

I keep a motto that Mary-Madeleine copied out for herself on a scrap of unruled notepaper: “Luck is when Opportunity meets Preparation.” The *t*’s aren’t crossed, but the script is bold and the sentence is circled in red. It describes an imaginary encounter; she had no Opportunity, and except for her death, she was never Prepared. I held my breath by a bank of wheelchairs outside her door, listening to her doctor. “We’ve done everything we can,” “You waged a good fight,” “It’s time to just make you comfortable.” Which meant, *Pump you full of morphine and let you die*. She said, “I see.” See what?—a short man with huge eyebrows and chalky skin.

In the hall he took my elbow and said in a whisper, “Make sure she understands.” He was discouraged: he’d been forced to renounce for a moment the lie that everyone gets well, that death is weak and complex, an unsuccessfully treated illness. I went from bystander to herald, carrying a coffin into the sickroom. Beige drapes with abstract leaf patterns held the daylight back. I sat next to her. Her head rolled and pain sort of pushed her tongue out of her mouth, basking in slow motion. I waited with my question until the spasm subsided, one expression on my face as though no time had passed.

“Mighty Mouse is on his way.” She was referring to a little blue pill.

“Mary-Madeleine, do you understand what your doctor said?”

She replied wistfully, “I guess everyone has to die sometime.” With that

she divorced her rambling life from the medical marvels and aligned herself with the dying of the ages—with them she met her destiny. Had she pretended to herself for our sake that she was recovering? She must have felt a pang as her departing relatives took life with them, and relief for the same reason. The farce was over and her solitude was complete. Her large body began to dwindle; one dawn a month later, she faded away.

I think of Mary-Madeleine's death in contrast to the death of Kelly, a very sweet man, my dad's best friend. Kelly died when I was sixteen. He checked in to the hospital for nothing special, some tests, and quickly fell apart; he didn't want to live. My mom told me he died gasping for air, head rearing up, eyes bulging, mouth gaping. She said it was heartless of the staff to let Eleanor see him like that, but now I see him that way and always will. He struggles for breath, the terror of suffocation, a surprise forever protracted, rising. While Mary-Madeleine subsides, her vital signs lose tension. She falls through veils of morphine to a second sleep. Kelly's spasm lasts through eternity like the end of a story where he gains or loses everything. After his funeral, stepping down from the porch, the tendons standing out from his neck became the elastic band in Eleanor's undies. It snapped; the bright red panties sagged into view below the widow's weeds. The priest thought her laughter was convulsed sorrow.

• • •

On this stage I have constructed for my soliloquy, I *can't speak* about my death or bid you look in my grave. As for ordering my tomb, over the two dates put an image of men fucking—to show what made me happy. Do the following stories belong here? They don't "come to mind" but intrude. The first is more resonant but simple to tell. It's just the pleasure my mother took in four eggs she brought 350 miles to my house. "See, it has a blue shell." She held out the egg for me to look at, though not to hold. "Bob, look at this." She was submitting a new piece of evidence, asking me to reconsider, but the problem was beyond articulation. Her elegant face tipped back, a conclusive gesture, and for a moment she occupied the sixty-eight years of her life. It was a moment, breathless and possible. Sheer awareness of my own life made me tired. Dressing and undressing the body, treating its illnesses, feeding it, cleaning it, overwhelming it with orgasms *and so on*. I asked for her best maternal advice. She replied without hesitation as though she'd been