

Care Giving: An Elegy

Cynthia Hogue

You hold the hand, perfectly still, with all your strength. Surely, if you can only try hard enough, something will move and live again, something will revive.

—Variation on a quotation from Margaret Atwood's *Bodily Harm*

The windows in the room in which you are giving care are storm
and once filled with flies so many bluebottles caught against
spring's light Father gathered them gently, in tissue, to clear the air

of all the buzzing motes of night
he then cast into the March wind.
You—raise your voice to be heard

*

in the small room with the large marriage bed with the marriage bed-
spread which is stained with all manner of
memories shadowing the pieces of mind and the making peace with what has been

done or said—all, now,
done. *I was stroking his arm*
and the soft hair bent as I stroked

*

and that is how I knew he was alive
then the hair unbending
and his skin cooling—

What's happening? she asked
Mother grimaces inside her stare
out the window at the green

fields and finding such an effort
to form words to express her experience of
Whitman's spirit's transcendence which she cannot

avow: *The whole afternoon*
and the next day the cat in the crook of
my arm channeled your father—

*

the words welling from
the failings of aged nerves
to blunt their charge:

raw, and her voice's sudden
agony: *What am I*
going to do?

*

She is an *I* who can
no longer read hear
or walk and *he*—

her ears, cane, brain—
was dying his hand
was in yours

(Did you just say,
she turned at that moment to ask,
We love you? We love you?)

The Blizzard

Cynthia Hogue

I looked for the room I was booked in
for one thing or another we say we'll do
and regret when the time comes the unlooked-for
encounters with black ice, the kind strangers offering
a hand up. A gallery with high ceilings and windows.
I wandered blank as a snow drift.

There were candelabra scattered about
on oak sideboards. Someone lit real candles
because the lights had gone out.
The aromatic flames of beeswax,
the golden flickers of risibility
with their cold blue hearts.

I happened upon a grand staircase widening
down to the hall. Marble that, polished,
shone translucent. *Hello*, I called,
looking at someone near the foot of the stairs
about to leave. *What*
should I be doing? My arms stretched out like wings,

white, almost diaphanous my blouse.
Everyone I'd seen was white, actually,
which I'd have thought strange,
except I did not think about it until now.
The stairway a dead giveaway: All the labor
to build it, the anonymity of the work,

the scarring of the mahogany bannister,
as if hundreds of sharpened nails
had scored the railing over the years. The person below left,
and I clapped, a curtain having fallen.
I should go, too. Into the tense
sudden silence of blizzard, the whiteout.