

Heroic Measures

O' mother,
my father, your husband and love of 50 years
is thrashing
all through the night.
Some nights, his sleeping hand jerks hard
against your face.
In the morning, uncomplaining, stolid,
you raise him up
to place the pill upon his tongue
that will wake him again.
Unable to speak at all,
he stares at you, through you,
sweet man who kissed you good morning
for 50 years
every day.
I hover by the door, ashamed
by your request to have me see,
but I understand...
you need a witness
to your loss, to his,
and it's all you ask.
How to imagine?
This Parkinson's disease steals in and out
of your home all day, capricious sorcerer
who shuts your husband off
and on, off and on, now you have him,
now you don't.
I know when we visit with his grandson,
we have it easy.
But you want him, need him,
plead with all of your daughters,
"Come. These visits wake him."
And it's true. If he's not napping,
he's always ready to clasp us,
one by one inside his arms,
and he hugs hard and long, even speaks
well enough to understand,
to ask us questions.

You weep all the time for movies, for tv commercials,
and just this summer,
for the sons of a British princess
who'd lost their mom,
(remembering, no doubt, your father's heart
failing him,
and with its demise, breaking yours,
when you were only 9,)

but never do you weep
for your own slow- motion
shattering life.
Never tears for yourself, apple of
your father's, your husband's eye,
unshakably loyal daughter, wife,
mother, Nana, wondering
with every birthday, every Jewish holiday,
when you will be completely
bereaved.

Leonore Gordon, 10/1997