Hands

Susan Jaret McKinstry

Carleton College, Northfield, MN, USA.

J Gen Intern Med 26(6):675

DOI: 10.1007/s11606-011-1675-z

© Society of General Internal Medicine 2011

To Michael Malloy

When the blind man fell on the Irish country road
One hundred uncertain steps from his cottage door,
How the world must have spun and flung
Out the forms tapped daily by his cane and boot soles,
Out beyond his prone body, pressed to the reek of warm tar,
Grit beneath his grasping hands, the rest a void.

Was he like a diver, disoriented
In the depths of his private disaster?
Did his thoughts churn upward, surface, and gasp?
The roar of the bus must have filled the air
Like a monster, or salvation, as he raised
his head higher to hear what was coming.

When I knelt by him he clutched my hand
As if he knew what I could offer him.
The bus engine ticked. The sheep grazed.
He spoke, midroad, fallen, as we waited for help.
Of his land and his attempt to walk and his game leg
and I saw all he could not:

The danger, the stunning green
Beauty of his land unspooling from our spot
On the pavement, the strangeness
Of my coming now, to this road
In County Mayo, to crouch beside him and hold his craggy hand.

When a car raced toward us I raised
My free hand to signal, but I knew
That if the car kept coming I would still
Be holding Michael Malloy's hand
As the world exploded.