

condition was not reversible. But how could I tell this religious man there would be no miracle for him?

Torn between the obvious and the miraculous, given this grave honor of rendering some kind of truthful information to a man momentarily clear enough to want to know what was really happening, I put my hand on his shoulder, smiled, and summoned my best imitation of the offhand remark, my best imitation of his own reassuring beside manner.

*You're doing OK. You'll pull out of this. You'll be going home soon.*

He looked into my eyes and at least for a moment, he knew the truth.

## EVELYN SHARENOV

### *DELIVERANCE*

Let me tell you about myself. I live alone and although that's a recent development, I'm settled with that. I consider myself average; well, maybe not average but not special or chosen in any way. I must add that I don't say this as an apology for any past hubris or explanation for my current station in life.

My son is healthy and intelligent. I usually enjoy good health although just now I'm down with the flu. I haven't moved from this bed in days, haven't showered or shaved or dressed. I'm perfectly comfortable. My son's cat is on the bed with me, basking in a square of sunlight, her pleasure principle undisturbed by my growing pains. I miss my son, suddenly and completely, my son of ten years ago, who would have fallen asleep in my lap. But he'll be home from college for spring break and then he'll be back for the summer. I reach over and scratch the cat under her chin; she stretches, then rolls onto her back. The cat, abandoned when my son went off to college, has adopted me and we sleep together in Eric's bed, keeping it warm for him in his absence.

Things average out. I like to think I am in the exact middle of my life, with as much ahead as has gone before. I have a small but respectable law practice. It has become more lucrative as the economy sinks into the Pacific Ocean and people sue each other not out of acrimony or greed but to survive. I like to think I am doing some good for my clients.

My wife's departure is not my first taste of loss. I've always felt as if something were missing, as if everything always turns out to be less than I expected—marriage, kids, life. When I was a kid I became obsessed with the plate-twirler on the Ed Sullivan show, the man who ran across the stage giving a twist to this pole or that plate, in an effort to keep them all spinning; I kept waiting for a single plate to fall and shatter but I can't recall that it ever happened while I was watching. My parents were mesmerized by animal acts