

Recovery · Joan Swift

*Now the stage becomes dark, and Man
challenges Nature—a stirring
encounter during which Nature is
bitten on the hip, with the result
that for the next six months the
temperature never rises above thirteen
degrees. . . . Woody Allen*

I FIRST SAW an artificial hip joint in the office of my San Francisco orthopedic surgeon. He was like a little boy with an erector set when he opened the drawer of his desk and pulled out what looked like a railroad spike with a knob on top. It was stainless steel and was used to replace the femur and ball part of the hip joint. His eyes gleamed. Pins, those metal sticks used to hold together the broken parts of a joint, would still be used in certain cases, but the astonishing material available now made it possible to replace entire joints. I remember a tiny old aunt who, one day while standing on the corner waiting for a bus, was swept up and away by a strong wind. Her hip was shattered when she landed on the pavement in front of a gas station and a pin was placed in it. Afterwards, she limped and had to swing her leg while holding onto the dining room table.

He didn't show me the plastic socket. In fact, I've seen one only as a shadowy outline on an x-ray of my own hip after surgery three or four years later in another city. It looked like the bell of a jellyfish or, greatly reduced in size, a hairdryer in a beauty parlor. The stainless steel spike with the knob and the plastic jellyfish together make a total hip joint. The procedure is called arthroplasty.

For years I was considered too young for arthroplasty. Surgeons disagreed among themselves on the longevity of the materials. Then, one morning last March, the sun traced another line across the sky and both my years and the metals were perfected. I saw them as two lines on a graph finally crossing.

Both the surgery and the recovery went well, except for a minor bladder infection. But then, infection anywhere in the body is dangerous when a prosthesis has been installed in human tissue. There is always the possibility it may attack the cells around the foreign material and render them incapable of accepting it. But the fevers were subdued and I left the hospital on schedule. It was a full year, though, before I was able to walk normally without pain.

Looking back across the months from the distance of my beachfront living room, I can still see the endless corridors as I saw them from the cart,

converging like lines in a stereopticon. And I can still see the wilderness of buildings, clouds, planes, rain, snow, and tossing branches I gazed at for thirteen days through the window of my hospital room. But I never hear the music anymore. I haven't heard it since the day I left. Once, playing the radio in the car, *Lara's Theme* enveloped me briefly like vapor from an aerosol can, but when I changed the station, it vanished. I can never hear that song without reliving the whole experience.

When I wake up I'm still in the operating room. My eyes are closed like a newborn kitten's, but I can hear the conversation of the nurses, the anesthesiologist who again is doing something to my arm. I'm vaguely aware the needle is gone. They're talking about karate. My doctor's voice, at first close, becomes more distant, then is gone. The others continue to talk. I can't feel my right leg at all, but something is pushing on my left one, something like a giant bellows squeezing and releasing. A minute or so passes before it squeezes, releases again. I don't like it. But even more uncomfortable is the pressure in my bladder. Besides my left leg, it's the only part of my body with any sensation. It occurs to me to ask for a bedpan, but I think better of the notion and wait. I can't even cross my legs. Although I was Hip Number Two and there is one more to follow me, no one seems to be in any hurry to get me out of there. I open my eyes and stare directly into the face of the anesthesiologist six inches away. He's removing a white cotton wrapping from my arm and seems startled by my gaze.

"Hi," I say, but he doesn't answer.

The position of my cart in the recovery room is opposite a wall with a clock. I see that it's shortly after noon and am relieved that everything has gone on schedule. I think about the x-ray of my right hip which loomed, brilliantly backlit, over the operating room and consider that it will never be part of my body again.

Two nurses walk back and forth between the carts, some of which bear bodies, others of which are empty. This is like a morgue, I think. On my right is a man who lies with his nose pointed solemnly at the ceiling. His eyes are closed and his head is swathed in yards of gauze and tape. There's nothing about him to suggest he's alive.

My bladder has swelled larger. One of the nurses swishes past and I ask her for a bedpan. She stops short, giving a little squeak.

"Did you say something?" she exclaims, leaning over and peering into my face as closely as I had peered into the face of the anesthesiologist.

"Bedpan." I realize now I'm slurring.

"You don't mean it!" she says, but turns and comes back shortly with a yellow plastic one which she has the skill to slide under my buttocks without disturbing my operated side.

I watch the clock proceed from twelve-thirty to one and then to one-thirty. I'm only vaguely aware of an I.V. bottle hanging over my left shoul-

der, the rubber tube descending from it, and the needle entering my arm. My bladder gets fuller and fuller, the membrane (I imagine it like the interior of a football) becoming more and more distended. The man beside me in the gauze and adhesive tape skull cap never moves. There are blue veins in his nose.

No use. At ten after two a decision is made to wheel me back to my room on Six Southwest. I'm not exactly sure just where that is in relation to the operating room in this part-new, part-old hospital, but I know Six Southwest is new. I don't notice much along the way, just that the bedpan has been removed and that something the size of a watermelon is occupying the space where my bladder should be.

In my room I meet for the first time the lovely nurse June. Lovely because, besides being young and blonde, she understands.

"Your sphincter muscles," she announces, "are still under the effects of the spinal anesthesia."

I beg her to catheterize me. I can't believe what I'm saying. No one has ever asked to be catheterized.

She frowns.

"I'll have to consult your doctor. It could give you an infection and that would be bad."

"Ask him, ask him," I prod.

"He doesn't make rounds until about seven."

"I can't wait." It occurs to me if I screamed it would help, but I don't.

June is the RN on the floor. Rather, one of two RNs. She has the private wing this week. She leaves for a moment, then returns, having made a decision. She's carrying a tube and a large metal pan. After a couple of minutes, the large metal pan is full. She calls for another receptacle. And then another. No one believes it.

My doctor is furious with her because, after that, I do get an infection. Antibiotics are doubled.

I discover, soon enough, that I'm able to sleep only on my back. Since infancy I've slept on my stomach, or at least fallen asleep in that position. Now I can't fall asleep at all. For four days only Demerol lets me drift away. One shot every four hours. First one shoulder gets it, then the other. Finally they start making tracks up and down my upper arms.

"What ever became of morphine?" I ask, longing for a deeper submer-sion. Everyone gasps.

As the spinal anesthesia wears off, I become aware that something is squeezing my right leg every couple of minutes, just as I knew when I woke in the operating room that something was squeezing my left. Both of my lower appendages are encased in white plastic stockings to which are attached hoses leading to a yellow compressed air tank. It sits at the foot of my bed, refugee from some flight into space, and pumps into the stockings

air which massages like fingers the immobile muscles of my calves. I'm told this prevents blood clots. I hated it earlier and I hate it now.

As well as the man who comes every day to make me inhale three-quarters of the earth's atmosphere which I must blow into his machine. I don't like him either. He wears a brown business suit, making me suspicious of his medical credibility. The huffing and puffing keeps my lungs clear and reduces the threat of pneumonia.

My right leg is suspended in a metal sling called a Zimmer. A length of lamb's wool reaching from my upper calf to my ankle supports it as it hangs in the air. Later, I'll exercise with it, they tell me.

My mind is alternately wild with energy, news, ideas, images, then set afloat on a blissful sea of unconsciousness after each Demerol injection. I'm on the phone with my daughter Emily, with friends Gen and Harriet. I call Lester at the office, my mother. I even phone City Hall about a neighbor's illegal fence. Everyone is amazed at my lucidity so soon after major surgery. My brain races, gets ahead of itself, maneuvers around corners and into tight crevices, emerges, and speeds on. But to erase the pain which becomes more and more evident as the spinal anesthesia wears off, I ring for the nurse who has the needle. Then it's as if a shade were pulled down, a blank shade without pictures. I doze off, not dreaming, not caring. The music hasn't started yet.

On the fourth day after surgery, I learn to live without Demerol. I don't know whose decision this is, perhaps my doctor's, but probably mine. Every square inch of both arms has been used and there's a large black-and-blue mark in the shape of a Rorschach ink blot on my right shoulder, where one of the nurses missed the muscle. Now the sleepless nights begin.

I'm lying in two a.m. darkness, my head aching and my stomach on fire, thinking about the pituitary gland. I read somewhere that it's shaped like a berry. Is it like a blueberry glistening with dew in the pre-dawn shadows deep inside the brain? With my eyes open I can make out the large rectangle of the window, the draperies' geometric squares in black, rust, and white. Light is sliding over the floor from some source I can't see like underwater lights in a swimming pool. With my eyes closed, I try to see the pituitary gland. Maybe it looks like a raspberry, the little round segments red and dusted with fuzz.

They've taken away the deep breathing machine. The yellow tank full of compressed air is gone too, along with the white plastic stockings which were fed by it every two minutes. I'm wearing white *elastic* stockings now and my legs expand and contract like the valves of a heart or the gills of a fish.

I feel like I'm lying on nails. I count the hours and for ninety-six of them I've been on my back, except for a half hour each night when three nurses push, lift, tug, and roll me over to my left side where I balance on my pelvic

bone until they return and maneuver me onto my back again. Once the nurses worked me over to the edge of the bed and let my legs dangle over. They stood me up for fifteen seconds and I looked under my right arm to see the eleven-inch incision which begins part way down my thigh and disappears up and around the bend of my buttock. It was held together by a row of brown bristles like the whiskers of a walrus.

The pituitary gland must look, I think, a bit like a tiny clapper in a large bell. The slightest movement and there's ringing. The clapper is necessary for the merriest tinkle, the loudest gong. When the pituitary is still, the body is silent. But the body clangs and clangs when the pituitary swings unexpectedly. That's why my head pounds and my stomach aches, why my back contracts with pains. The spinal anesthesia ran south to the fork of my legs, then along the route of my nerves until my right side was paralyzed. But some part of it also ran north to my brain and the pituitary.

I'm lying in the valley of my eight good pillows. They surround me like snowy hills. They prop me, keep me in place, but they don't help me sleep. Nor does Seconal. I must complain about that in the morning.

It's not music at all when I first hear it. It's a sort of buzzing, a swarm of bees on the right side of the bed. Without thinking, I start to turn, then remember I can only twist. But there's nothing there.

Okay. I'll sleep. If I shift all my weight to my left side, maybe that will work. The nightstand beside the bed is a dark hulk, and the books, magazines, cards, purse, and Kleenex piled on top of it make a jagged outline against the window beyond. Another hospital is framed in the glass. Its windows look back at me.

Now I hear it for the first time: *Edelweiss, edelweiss, every morning you greet me, small and white, clean and bright* . . . where is it coming from? I push the button which raises the head of the bed until my body and my legs make an angle of about one hundred fifty degrees. Ninety degrees or less can dislocate the prosthesis. An all-male chorus is singing. I can't quite make out the words, but I know the tune. I lean closer to the nightstand containing the TV tuning apparatus and pull back the hair from around my left ear. The voices could be coming from the little round holes in the speaker. I turn the volume down as far as it will go. I push the on-off button to make sure it's really off. Nothing. I turn on the light and examine the printing above each knob. One says RADIO, and when I turn it, it stops in six places. Six stations. But there seems to be no way to turn it off. There's no way to turn it on either.

Is it the radio? The voices seem to be coming more from the direction of the window seat. I switch the light off and peer into the depths of the console. Maybe it's a faulty transistor.

The all-male chorus has finished its version of *Edelweiss* and now a string orchestra is playing the same melody. They get through it once and start

over again. The second time, they stop halfway through and go back to the beginning. *Edelweiss, edelweiss* . . . the violins have deep smooth voices, but why do they keep repeating the same phrases over and over?

It's a rehearsal! That's it! But where? Zurich or Vienna or anywhere it's not three in the morning. Is my new hip joint picking up radio signals? I'm disregarding the fact that rehearsals aren't likely to be broadcast. I've heard of people whose silver inlays or fillings pick up radio stations. What if all my life now I'll have to listen to whatever the stainless steel head of my femur chooses to send pulsing to my inner ear. I move my leg to see if I can get it to play something else.

All at once the violins fade and the all-male chorus starts in again. Only briefly though. Suddenly birds are chirping the melody. *Edelweiss, edelweiss*. Robins and larks. They tweet right through to the end and go back to the beginning. Hundreds of birds have miraculously learned the tune. *Blossom of snow, may you bloom and grow, bloom and grow forever*. They haven't memorized the words, but I supply them.

For ten minutes the birds sing from some vague recess in the air. Then a man shouts, a piano plays lively dance music, and the number ends in a crash of keys.

I fall asleep.

I've never by habit arisen early. Those poets whose albas celebrate dawn have always puzzled me. Yet here in the hospital, I find myself looking forward to the sky's gradual graying, to the bustle in the hallway when nurses are changing shifts. It's seven a.m. I've had three hours sleep. Then I remember. It's Friday. I'm going to Physical Therapy today.

My impatience to be down there is related, I suppose, to the urge some women have to get out of bed mere hours after childbirth and scrub the floor. I imagine Physical Therapy as a kind of country, a land where beautiful mended bodies, shining and whole, some even healthily flushed with exertion, pedal or roll or pull under lights soft as the southern sun. It's a happy place and I'm anxious to go.

Everyone appears at once: a nurse's aide with a thermometer; a registered nurse with a little paper cup, the kind used for nuts at a children's party, full of pills; a practical nurse who takes from the bedstand a wash basin and soap; a girl in a green uniform bearing a tray with breakfast on it. I persuade her to open the draperies all the way so that I can see not only the hospital on the opposite hill but the powder-box roof of the new indoor stadium as well.

It's a typical March day: a huge black cloud in the upper right-hand corner of the window, baby blue on the left, and in between, tatters of sunshine on the roof of the building below. In a minute it's raining and the bare twigs of the birch trees whip around in the wind. I think of turning on the TV set.

Raising myself on my left elbow, I see it: the bedside console. It looks innocent enough. I put my ear to it as I did last night. Silence. But wait. Far away, so far away . . . what is it? Yes. It's *Lara's Theme*. Somewhere, my love . . . da da dee da da da. The sound tract from "The Sound of Music" and the one from "Dr. Zhivago" too!

I look at the console more closely: there's a metal label centered just below the controls:

Electronic Bedside Unit
120 VAC 60 HZ 10 AMP
Serial Number 17864
ES2 Not For Use In
Anesthetizing Location
HILL-ROM COMPANY, INC.
Division of Hillenbrand Industries
Batesville, Indiana

and

UL
Listed
Nurse Call Equipment
Electronic Bedside Unit
521 N

From now on I'll think of it as the Electronic Bedside Unit. It's more fitting. The sterility of its shelves for Kleenex and Swipes, its cupboard for the stainless steel bowl and yellow plastic bedpan, its brown plastic buttons and chrome knobs for summoning nurses or TV images, the wires and circuits inside: all beg for a more scientific designation than bedstand or console.

I remember the pinewash stand in my grandmother's rural Pennsylvania kitchen. Under its lid was a white washbasin ringed with green thistles. Next to it were a soap dish in the same pattern and a small rounded glass in the Wedgewood white for the family's seven toothbrushes. When the lid was closed, the grandest piece of the set stood on top, a big pitcher with a scalloped handle and pouring spout, thistles and white.

From the black speaker beside me *Lara's Theme* is illicitly seeping. I promise myself to get to the bottom of the affair.

"How do you turn the radio on?" I ask Madge Okada who comes in to wash my back.

"You can't," she says. "There's no radio in there."

She's referring to the Electronic Bedside Unit.

"It's wired for a radio, but not connected. Maybe when the building is finished they'll hook it up."

I remember then the man who sat in the admitting office with me Sunday

afternoon. On top of his suitcase was a bright yellow table model radio, its brown cord wound around and around it, crisscrossing the dial and the speaker. He had come prepared.

It requires three people to hoist me from the bed to the cart. One of my eight pillows goes with me between my legs. I hook my right arm around the orderly's neck and with a heave I slide across the mattress. A nurse's aide lifts my legs. Another takes my robe from the closet and, laying it across my stomach, straps me firmly onto the cart. It's flatter than any medieval conception of the earth. It's as hard as quarry tile which I suspect is underneath the sheet covering it. All my bones poke into me.

It's pleasant though to take in new scenery. Chris, the orderly from Physical Therapy, wheels me deftly down the widely angled halls of Six Southwest and, although I walked them nervously the night before surgery, it's as if I've never seen them before. We pass a long row of windows lining a hall to another wing. Through them I see snow swirling against the panes. The sun is inexplicably shining.

Chris has a red beard and from my supine position I look straight up at its bushy bottom. Chris is a beard and two nostrils. He's an art student and has studied in New York. Now he pushes orthopedic patients to and from the Physical Therapy department of the hospital ten hours a day, seven days a week, followed by seven days off when he paints. I want to lie on my side, bend my knees, raise my head. But I can't.

The elevator takes us to the basement. Six Southwest opened just three months ago. Some of the rest of the hospital is fairly new, remodelled four or five years ago. But Physical Therapy is located in the oldest part of the hospital still in use and the halls leading to it are already half torn away. Wires hang forlornly from exposed beams. The walls and ceilings are a patchwork of mortar, tile, and vizqueen. I see loudspeakers over doors opening on nothing.

It's like the line-up at the supermarket check-out stand. Only I'm in the basket. Chris jockeys my cart into a position against the wall, sixth from a yellow doorway, and goes away. I lie stiff as Nefertiti's mummy under my sheet. Pains shoot like arrows up and down my back and legs. There's no way I can keep the tears from running down my face. Like rain in gutters, they stream into my ears. Thunder crashes outside and from the room with the yellow doorway I hear a man's voice moaning no no no. Thunder rolls again, deep and close.

There's something brightly colored just over my head to the right. Twisting, I see it's a picture of two birds and I try to concentrate on their teal blue plumage. They perch on a vertical branch. The higher one holds a brown berry in its beak and leans to drop it in the open beak of the other. The lettering beneath is written in script and it takes me some minutes to make out what it says, reading it as I am from the bottom up. They're Passenger Pigeons, *Columbia Migratoria*, Male 1, Female 2. I notice as I'm finally

wheeled through the yellow doorway that the entire hallway is lined with pictures of birds. I waited under an extinct breed.

His name is Bob. He has kind eyes but he tells me I must push my right leg out hard against the palm of his hand. There is a large rat in my thigh. Its teeth gleam in the desert moonlight. I feed it again and again with the only food I have until somewhere on the other side of the curtain, a telephone rings. I'm glad to be left alone while Bob takes the call although he instructs me to practice head lifts while he's gone.

All at once someone starts a machine in the next room. Water splashes, a motor whirrs. Probably the whirlpool bath in the room next to this one. I remember seeing it as I was wheeled past on the cart. How lovely it would be to lie with the warm water moving around my legs like soft, hungry house cats. Suddenly, quite distinctly out of the bubbling and churning, come the strains of a familiar song. I abandon the head lifts to listen more closely. It's *Auld Lang Syne*. It's Guy Lombardo and New Year's Eve in Times Square!

I'm told, although I've never seen it myself, of course, that propped in my hospital bed I'm like the star in a stage play. A row of lights flanks me on either side, ready to illuminate me. The Electronic Bedside Unit guards me on the left, on the right a table which slides up and over the bed or folds down. Above on a chain hangs the metal trapeze I grab for lifting myself. The Zimmer swings at the end of the bed. And the bed itself is electric, capable of folding me up in its middle if the wrong switch is activated.

I have the upper half raised so that I'm sitting up each morning when some representative of the medical profession arrives. Not my doctor, but one of his associates. There are five of them in all, I deduce. They usually appear while I'm eating breakfast.

"Hi," I say. Then, before he can dart behind the curtain and vanish for the day, "Please change me to another sleeping pill."

"Didn't the Seconal work?"

"I thought it was Nembutol."

"No, you were switched from Nembutol to Seconal."

"I thought I was switched from Seconal to Nembutol."

"It was the other way around."

"Can I try something else?"

"I'll leave an order for Dalmane," he said, and left, whoever he was.

I love being alone in my room, the door closed against hallway traffic, my ears alert for violins. Hearing Guy Lombardo in the whirlpool bath means the music can't be coming out of the Electronic Bedside Unit. Or does it?

Electronics. I confess to myself I don't know what it is. Those 747s flying

low over the hospital on their approach to the airport: some of the passengers inside are wearing earphones, listening to taped music. Maybe the transistors in the Electronic Bedside Unit are picking up the waves even when the unit isn't turned on. No. It could be even more complicated than that. What about the dozens of electrical and electronic devices in the hospital: the x-ray machines, dialysis machines, equipment for electrocardiograms, ultrasound, microwave ovens, electric beds, even telephones and elevators? I'm surrounded by circuits and wires and transistors. Currents might easily cross, messages garble, the pulses of one machine vibrate through the veins of another.

But why am I the only one to hear the music?

I gaze at the collage I asked mother to scotch tape to the wall opposite my bed when she visited yesterday. It arrived in the morning mail, a large manila envelope with a rectangle of cardboard inside. On it Douglas had pasted clippings from magazines: a girl skiing, a Monterey cypress, a shell, seaweed, a seagull, blue sky, the bow of a boat, and, in the lower left-hand corner, a man and a woman walking along a beach, the sea and the rocky headland stretching clear to the upper left. Across the top in the cut-out letters of a ransom note: Get Well.

There are no mountains out there. No sand. No sea. There is no world beyond this hospital room. Apparently I'm the only one who knows this.

The man in the next room has a tape deck. One nurse mentioned it to another this afternoon, and since she'd forgotten to close my door when she left the room, I overheard her. I also overheard that his name is Mr. Morley.

He's another total hip. Seventy-three. He hasn't walked since he was eleven years old. He travelled from east of the mountains to this kingdom of insomniacs to lie, like the rest of us, in the changeless position of a fossil locked in its bed of stone. When the Seconal fails and then the Nembutol, does he crave some lullaby to soothe him to sleep? He's taped *Edelweiss* and *Lara's Theme!* To the strains of *Somewhere, my love* he's blissfully dreaming, the tape deck going around and around like a satellite in space, the music repeating.

I use nighttime now for plotting and experimenting. I try, for instance, to make the music stop by changing the position of my head. My metal bed would be a good conductor and so I push the button which raises the upper part of the mattress and when the angle is steep enough, I slide down until my feet are hanging over the end. There's no noticeable difference. I try claspings and unclaspings the trapeze over my bed. I try swinging the Zimmer in all the directions it will go. I put my fingers in my ears to see if something's spinning in my head. So why not investigate the Sleep Tape Theory?

I push the nurse call button on the Electronic Bedside Unit. It, in turn,

lights up a bulb above 602 at the nurses' station. In only a few seconds a dazzling brunette pokes her head around the white curtain I keep drawn in front of the closed door. She's a new one.

"You're going to think I'm mad," I began.

"Mad gr-r-r-r?"

I like her immediately. She tells me she's a "float," works this floor and this wing only every now and then, which is why I haven't seen her before. I explain about the music and my theory involving Mr. Morley's tape deck.

I've noticed among the night nurses a certain curiosity about the matter of the music. Except for Madge Okada, the nurses on day duty are preoccupied with baths and pills, with strapping you onto stretchers and carts in the most painful position possible. I asked Madge one day if she heard *Lara's Theme* coming from the speaker in the Electronic Bedside Unit when the radio that wasn't in it wasn't turned on. She put her ear to the speaker, shook her head, and announced, "Nope, she's gone back to Siberia."

The "float" is interested in my theory and scurries off to Mr. Morley's room.

"I'll pretend I'm checking his urinal," she says, her dark brown eyes gleaming.

In three minutes she's back.

"Nothing's moving," she says.

"You're sure the tape deck isn't going around?"

"I'm sure. Mr. Morley is asleep."

For a second my mind goes to the urinal. Was it full? Then I hear her suggest that maybe the woman in the room on the other side has brought her radio from home.

"I never hear her," I say in defense. "Only when one of her visitors pulls the folding chairs from the wall clamps. What's underneath?"

"Medical."

"What's that?"

"Heart patients. Cancer. Kidney disease. They sleep all night."

Do they dream too, I wonder?

"What's above us," I ask.

"The roof."

Ah, yes. The roof. I should have known that. On the cart, staring straight up from my lashed position, I've seen the brown stains around the acoustical tiles of the ceiling. Leaks. The new wing is imperfect.

The "float" leaves me to my ruminations. That's when I hear in quick succession, one scarcely letting the other sing itself out before the next begins, three new numbers. First, *Happy Birthday To You*, although I'm a Scorpio and this is March. Next, *Hi Lily Hi Lo*. And then, formidably, *The Battle Hymn Of The Republic*. They come from behind the bed. I roll to my left side, grab the headboard with both hands and perilously hike myself up

just far enough to peer over. Nothing. Nothing there but the eye of the nightlight spreading a faint fan of illumination over the floor.

My walker and I go walking every day now. Homo erectus. It's a strange kind of ambulation. I clutch the aluminum with both hands and shuffle forward, one foot at a time, heel, toe, heel, toe. My legs can't remember how to do it. Is it all right to bend my knee? Both knees? Not too much weight on the right one. Then the rat comes out of the crevice in the rocks and his eyes are gleaming ore.

Some adjustment in my inner ear must be responsible. Each time I return to my horizontal position and the room quiets and the clouds resume their usual cant in the sky, the entertainment begins. *Lara's Theme* floats from the TV speaker. *Edelweiss* drifts from the blower in the heating unit under the window seat. And now, another new tune! I lean closer to the speaker in the Electronic Bedside Unit. There's no doubt. *Five foot two, eyes of blue, oh what those five feet can do, has anybody seen my gal?* I can even make out the words!

I ring for the nurse.

"June, listen. This thing's playing and it's not even turned on!"

June dutifully leans over and puts her ear to the speaker in the Electronic Bedside Unit. She slowly shakes her head, then attempts to change the subject by mentioning cheerily that it's time for my pills. She whips into the hall and comes right back with a little paper cup full of green, red, yellow, orange, and brown capsules and tablets.

I stare at them.

Green is for iron. Brown for thyroid. Red for something I can't remember. The yellow one is a stool softener. Orange is the antibiotic I still take four times a day. Although my bladder infection has been cured, no chances are being taken.

"June," I say, "are you sure you don't hear *How Much Is That Doggy In The Window?*"

It occurs to me I'm hallucinating. Red, green, brown, yellow, orange. I'm drugged. Why didn't I think of it before? I'm having auditory hallucinations! In the eyes of the staff I'm a madwoman. I think of Moses and the voice of God booming from the one cloud over the Midian desert. I consider Joan of Arc, the whispers of saints in her ears.

On the wide windowsill blooms the Visiting Orchid. Brian said it should be placed there, to the far left where the sun as it traverses toward the west can endow it with its smile all afternoon. Gen thought it would do better on the shelf next to the TV set, where, should the sun come out, the light would be more diffuse. Three times the orchid went back and forth until finally it stayed on the windowsill, since it was a cloudy day.

I look at it now, the pale blossom which seems to be lavender but up close

is creamy with pale pink spots. It's perfect, for isn't that why people like orchids? Their perfection and their fragility. The calamities which can occur: bacteria, fungus, sunburn. And the perfection which is always possible in spite of it all. It leans out into the medicinal air, frail but sturdy on its twisting brown stalk. What did they say it's called? *Mixed Blessing*.

A change is occurring. *Lara's Theme* and *Edelweiss* are being replaced, perhaps for the sake of my questionable sanity. If I am indeed hallucinating, I'm doing it with the minds and ears of my mother and aunts. When they were young, my mother told me, they used to walk arm in arm every evening down the dirt street of their little country town. When they weren't looking for The Dipper or chattering, they sang. Songs like *In The Gloaming* and *Let The Rest Of The World Go By*. Idyllic, pastoral. Maybe they sang *Tramp, Tramp, Tramp, The Boys Are Marching*. And when my mother was old enough, she might have danced to *Put your little foot, put your little foot, put your little foot right there, put your little foot, put your little foot, put your little foot right there*.

Suddenly I realize that many of the lyrics concern *feet*. Or feet involved in some kind of activity. *Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. They are TRAMPLING out the vintage were the grapes of wrath are stored. Five foot two, eyes of blue, oh what those FIVE FEET CAN DO. TRAMP, TRAMP, TRAMP, the boys are MARCHING*. Leslie Caron danced to *Hi Lily Hi Lo*.

I began pool therapy today. Wheeled down the long hall with the Audubon prints, I lay swathed in sheets. I wore a pink-and-white candy striped romper suit safety-pinned at the shoulders. Chris pushed me to the shallow end of the pool where I was unveiled. The sheets peeled off. I rolled to the edge of the water. How did my legs get in? I was clinging to the blue tile edge, walking sideways like a crab. Walking! At the deep end the water reached to my ribs. As I walked back and forth from one side to the other, I hung onto metal bars. It seems now I must have been wearing seven league boots. Or was I, for that short time, a butterfly emerged from a chrysalis of sheets? I moved in a biome of lightness.

Mr. Morely entered shortly after me in a canvas sling which lowered him gently into the pool. I'm ashamed now that I accused him of having a Sleep Tape. Although he appeared to be the kind who might like *Lara's Theme*. Tomorrow I'll go about things more scientifically.

The TV service man turns out to be a girl. I thought, before ruling out the possibility of some electronic malfunction in favor of auditory hallucinations, I should have the system checked.

The TV set, which sits on a high shelf opposite my bed, is connected to the Electronic Bedside Unit by some mysterious network of wires inside

the walls. I can turn it off and on, raise and lower the volume, change channels, by twisting knobs. The sound flows out of the Bedside Unit's speaker.

The TV girl wants to know why I'd like the TV speaker's wires disconnected from the Electronic Bedside Unit's wires. I was certain she'd ask.

"Well," I start out. "Can you hear anything right now? Music, I mean. Can you hear someone singing *We'll build a sweet little nest somewhere in the west and let the rest of the world go by?*" I feel foolish.

She says no. But she doesn't laugh.

"I've got a radio at home that plays jazz when it's not plugged in," she says.

A wavelet of envy laps over me. She hears *South Rampart Street Parade* while I have to listen to *The Battle Hymn Of The Republic*.

But the experiment fails. She's pleased to play detective but when the two speakers are disconnected, some faint unrecognizable tune still floats around the room like a ghost whose soul is denied rest.

"It's funny," she says. "When I unplug my radio at home, I never hear anyone speaking. It's always just music and singing. And it always sounds like it's coming from so far away. Like it's coming from the moon."

I'm still considering that remark. It would explain why the numbers aren't contemporary, why they were popular years and years ago. The moon or some other distant body in space, maybe a *radio star*, received those signals decades ago and now is sending them back!

I'm rising in a bathysphere from some deep watery place. The Mariana Trench had me chained in darkness. There were no dreams. Now I'm coming up. Up. Slowly. The water turns from black to deep luminous blue, then to a kind of feathery green. I'm nearing the surface. I'll drown if I can't breathe.

One of the night nurses stands beside the bed, in her hand the little paper cup.

"I'm sorry to wake you," she says. "You can have another sleeping pill if you want."

I swallow the antibiotic and then the Dalmane, which seems to work.

"This is the last time I'll have to get you up in the middle of the night. Doctor's taking you off antibiotics."

I try to remember what color it is. Red? Purple? Not green. That's iron.

I turn to get back into the bathysphere but both it and the water are gone.

There's something different about the room. Some motion, some force as subtle and pervasive as the change of seasons inhabits the air. Is it spring? I sense leaves pushing through membranes, bulging and flexing. Just outside the window, sap is driving upward in the trees. Nothing can stop it. It rises to the highest branches. Beyond the glass there is the fresh, heady roar of a city. The TV speaker is silent. The Electronic Bedside Unit is mute. The fan inside the window seat is blowing warm air into the room.

Suddenly I realize the violins are no longer playing. Not the smallest shred of a melody hangs in the air. The all-male chorus is gone and the lofty choir intoning *Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord*.

Which is the hallucination, I wonder. The silence? Or the day-and-nightlong pouring of song into my head? I feel for the first time since surgery that I might actually walk again someday without pain. Like Rogers and Astaire, the acetabulum and the ball head of the femur are partners in a dance. I see them gliding across the floor. Ginger is bending over Fred's outstretched arm until her hair brushes the hardwood. Nobody thinks about bone or plastic or stainless steel. Only the dance matters.

I never hear Guy Lombardo in the whirlpool bath anymore. Maybe my scraping and clumping along the Audubon hallway on my crutches drowns him out. Maybe he's gone back to Times Square. But through my room still waft the strains of twenty pieces. I escape only into the shower. There I soap what parts of me I can reach without narrowing too many angles and cling to the metal bars around the stall.

I'm not hallucinating. I haven't swallowed an antibiotic for seventy-two hours. Yet the music goes on. Now it's the holidays. *Jingle Bells* and *Silent Night*. What if the stainless steel in my hip joint is receiving signals, after all? When I'm finally home, will I pick up *Hark The Herald Angels Sing* clear from the moon?

This is my last day. An orderly from x-ray appears in the doorway shortly after ten in the morning. My hip is to be photographed one more time before I leave, the fifth picture-taking session in thirteen days. I think idly of radiation poisoning as I'm strapped to the cart and wheeled away.

X-ray hasn't improved during my stay. A series of right angle turns executed with military precision by the x-ray orderly takes us to the hospital's catacombs where the ubiquitous wires hang like stalactites from the ceiling. Carts are jammed in the hallway like logs. A young man with red hair and only one leg sits patiently in a wheelchair, his chin sunk on his chest. He doesn't look up. A white-haired old woman lies on a cart telling someone named Stella whom only she can see not to do it. Only two of the x-ray rooms are in use.

I'm finally wheeled into one of them. There a young technician arranges me on the wide table as if I were a bunch of flowers. The right leg must be turned just a little bit more this way, the left pelvic bone that way. When she gets me at last into a position not indigenous to the human species, she tells me to hold it and not breathe. I obey and am rewarded with a ten-by-twelve glossy of my new right hip joint.

My native ilium curves in shadows upward and disappears. The visible part of my pelvic cavity appears in the x-ray like one-half of a black valentine. The top of my thigh bone, the femur, has been neatly sawed off and a spike driven down into the marrow of its center, with flanges at the top to

keep it from descending forever. I see the femur faint as a whisper. Above the flanges, the spike narrows and bends, then suddenly grows a large round top which fits into an equally round cup glued into the ilium. The cup is ghostly as my own bone because it's made of plastic, while the stainless steel spike is bold as a dagger. Between the cup and the pelvic cavity floats a bright little hat-shaped piece of metal. It looks like an Amish hat though when I ask my doctor about it, he says it's a sombrero. Its purpose is to prevent the glue from seeping into the vital organs.

Two dollars is added to my hospital bill and I take the x-ray home with me.

Patients are usually discharged between eleven a.m. and noon. Lester is tied up at a meeting until four, so I must wait. I have a plan. Between the time most patients are discharged and the time others are admitted, some of the rooms on Six Southwest may be empty.

I look in both directions up and down the hall. Even the nurses' station is momentarily deserted. I start off toward the long window at the end of the hall, inching my way along although I'm getting better with the crutches.

The first room I pass is Mr. Morley's. He's still in bed, his left leg hanging in the Zimmer. I see his tape deck is motionless. In the next room a nurse's aide is shaking linen about, changing the bed. The door to the third room is shut, a sign on it forbidding visitors. A fourth reveals through its open door a maid moving a mop around and around in circles on the tile floor.

At last I come to a room which is empty. The chair near the window has been placed at the angle it assumes when no one is about to sit in it. The bed is newly made and cranked high like a snow-white bier. I crutch around its foot and over to the Electronic Bedside Unit. It's identical to the one in my room and probably to all those in the hospital. Leaning as far over as I can, I put my right ear close to the speaker. I don't breathe. Mine was in the middle of *Good King Wenceslaus* when I left. This one is silent. I don't know what it means.