

ANTON KRUEGER

Uncle Noodle

"Ah," he seemed surprised to see me,
"Now you find out who really cares..."

His kidneys hadn't been on the job in months,
and with the machines failing, his hands
were fattening into stubby yellow fingers,
as the waste shored up inside of him.

I touched his arm, and we joked about
the broad blunt strokes of the casiotone
the old dame played for the lunch ~~orders~~ next door.

Uncle Noodle had always been my favourite.
In a world where adults were always certain,
ready to disdain and judge and pass verdict –
I loved it that he was indecisive, insecure, unsure.
Often wretched, often defeated.

His heart had chasmed in the
wake of his wife's leaving,
finally dividing him from all
his hopes, collapsing his dignity
destroying his happiness machinery.

I remembered him howling in the garden,
as a posse of therapists manhandled him to the ground,
trying to soothe his grief with a needleful; while
he tried to fight them off, for the right to stop his life.

While he'd hovered on the brink, deciding
whether to keep on at this living, we'd laughed
~~endlessly~~ about his bedfellows in the *Weskoppies* ward
one repeatedly folding / unfolding a newspaper,
another operatically singing the praises of the awful food.

That was 25 years before, and he'd somehow dragged
his unwilling carcass through those dreadful days;
but there were now no more choices anymore...

When they'd moved him from Maritzburg to George,
his brother (my father) and his sister (my aunt) had tossed out
many many overcrowded cardboard boxes crammed with slides –
ten thousand, twenty, a lifetime's worth of coloured lights,
vast accumulation of lonesome wanderings.

The slides had been thrown out, turfed,
rubbished as unstorable.

I stroked his head,
said "It's okay,"
caught eyes
bewildered by fear.

I wished I could ease his panic at the inevitable.
Produce something solemn: "Be at Peace,"
or even "Good luck," or something.

Which words relieve the final boarding call?
The final passing on of lives...

"I'm sorry about your slides," I said.