

**For  
A Good Friend  
Struggling**

“I’ve got cancer,” you tell me,  
abruptly, bluntly. Will you forget me now?”  
I am stunned into silence. For over thirty years  
I have known you, a strong, healthy woman,  
not someone who would pollute her body  
with drugs or alcohol, not even smoke.  
Yet there it is. Cancer. A tumor in the spine.  
Smaller ones spread over the lungs.  
“It’s ironic,” you say. A certain *lack* of poetic justice  
since your life was led clean, not like these movie stars  
one reads about, whose dissolution led to failed organs,  
early deaths. You, who have always been delicate in body  
and mind, someone who carefully thought things, carefully  
held things, carefully lived, lives now frantic, uncertain.  
I see an article online when I login today, about the *Titanic*,  
and it reminds me of you. A grand creature, old fashioned,  
aware of the finer things in life, the niceties offered, taken, given  
away, such as friendship, and I think how all that might go down,  
even though I think you unsinkable, and I think how empty my life  
might be, without your voice, your words, your unexpected bursts  
and then the long silences when life gets too busy for friends to spend  
long hours on the phone, reading poems to each other, a fan club of two.  
“You’re not dying,” I assure you, though most certainly we all are, sooner  
or later, you rather more certain of sooner than you were two months ago.  
The radiation is tiring, and lying on your back painful, but you get through it  
the best way you can, writing poems in your head, memorizing  
the lines, over and over till at last freed from stillness you leap from the table  
(as best as you are able, being, after all, 80 years old, injured back, injured heart),  
and write the words down, pouring them out, rushing home to the typewriter  
(one of the few people I know who has no computer), clacking the keys in fury  
not saying, but yet, not not saying, “why me? Why me?” in the poem, ending  
so brilliant, so full of light, like you mentioned, the radiance  
emitting even now, even now as your lay there  
playing it over and over:  
what did I do? What did I do?  
And nothing, of course, is the answer.

## **Some Girl named Natasha**

You hear the name and right away  
You feel snow and fur caps  
Pulled over long, dark hair,  
A foreign accent and lonesome  
Miles of tundra, barren and cold.  
You listen to the story and your breath  
Comes out white clouds of frost.  
You can't imagine the innocence,  
The heartbreak in being naive,  
And you want desperately  
A happy ending, a Bullwinkle  
Come to the rescue, but not this,  
This boy standing before you,  
This one so earnestly preaching  
The virtues of giving to friends  
In need, answering the call  
With the last of his summer money.  
You know then and there he's just a boy  
With a moose of a heart, and secretly,  
Oh so secretly, you're glad he is what he is.  
Not a Boris in sight.

## Dissecting the Frog

First, make sure it's dead.  
The first cut is crucial  
and takes inordinate time.  
Not too much pressure  
as to damage the heart,  
but enough to slice clean  
through skin to bone.  
Peel the chest wall slowly back,  
pin to the table, expose  
the pancreas, liver, stomach, and lungs.  
Listen for the last gasp of air  
escaping the confinement of life.  
The male will have fat pads  
beneath his meaty thumbs,  
a throaty voice with a sticky tongue,  
and a predilection for hopping  
from lily to lily. Such habits  
have a tendency to recur over time.  
Take note. Beware. Tighten the pins.

## **Midnight Ride to Kendall**

(A play in two stanzas)

Man on the phone: put on nothing and come. Leave now.

Woman: It's midnight!

Man: All the better.

Woman: I have to work.

Man: So do I.

Woman: I'm on my way.

Man: I can't come.

Woman: One of us has to.

Man: I'm sorry.

Woman: It's not about that.

Man: But it's fun to try.

Woman: Is it my fault?

Man: No. it's me. I can't.

Woman: I have to go. It's almost dawn.

Man: Breakfast?

**Dear Grandson:**

There is nothing I can tell you  
you don't already know; you have  
the answers to life's mysteries  
today, tomorrow, and all the days after  
all figured out, so I can rest  
easy knowing I won't be called  
for stain removal, instructions  
on how to pick up shattered glass,  
bake a meatloaf, treat a fever, a rash,  
a sore throat, a sliced thumb, the flu,  
sew a button, iron a pleat, slice a tomato,  
grill a steak so it doesn't catch fire.  
I won't be called to check the tires,  
get the oil changed, fill the fluids,  
change the wiper blades, identify  
that weird noise when you turn the key  
or brake very hard—you have  
all that covered in your vast store  
of knowledge about everything that matters.  
I can go to sleep each night calmly  
as you study long into the night,  
knowing that should you fail:  
My doors are locked,  
I've moved away,  
address unknown.  
But then, knowing everything as you do,  
you will already have known that,  
as well as how to find me.

Best of luck  
Love, Granny