

# In Passing to Her Fathers

Warren Hatch

In Saint George, Lena McCain had cancer.  
She set her house in order.

In Las Vegas, the doctors went after the cancer with a knife,  
got it, watched her closely.  
They did not know if she would live.  
She received rites of priesthood from her sons.  
She would have another seven years.  
With her husband, she returned to the temple of Saint George  
and tended the cottages facing the south wall of the temple,  
across an avenue of climbable maples.

Seven years later  
my wife and I watched a pelican riding the stream  
near shore, upriver.  
Boys were up there too, in marshes splashing,  
and the pelican moved out into the current,  
gathered himself, and flew up from the water.  
He flew low in front of us like a cloud.  
We agreed that grandmother would die.

I went to Las Vegas with my daughter, my brother, my cousin.  
It was August—the night of falling stars,  
and six days before the eclipse of the moon.  
Few stars trailed down the sky.  
We waited as long as an hour  
for the silence of their passing  
as we floated south and west, into night,  
under a certain weight of stars.  
My daughter awoke and cried. The night was too vast,  
and I held her, making her world possible again.  
She clutched my shirt until her hands forgot.

Near morning, we floated in desert. The West burned low,  
marking Las Vegas.  
The sun rose behind us as we drove down into the city.  
Daybreak is heavy there.

In Las Vegas we slept,  
then visited aunts and uncles, sitting on couches,  
without my wife, a thing that perplexed my daughter.  
In evening we went to Grandmother.

Again an uncle anointed her.  
His hands trembled—he pressed the vial against a finger,  
leaving a bead of pure olive oil,  
touching her temples where the bandages ended,  
spreading his palms over her head,  
bowing, praying, touching like dying wind.  
Again the uncle of seven years before  
sealed the anointing and blessed her:

You have been here before and been made well—  
You have no task here now.  
Your Father has a place for you.  
He is mindful of you.  
You shall not suffer.  
Prepare your family for your passing.

At five-two, she could snap any bed sheet  
into symmetrical folds  
in an economy of grace without it touching the ground.  
Try this jam, she says,  
it's so good it'll make your tongue slap out your brains.  
She is clever, an Odyssean.  
She will sleep longer, then longer,  
then not awaken, she knows,  
and sleeps with a cat's astuteness  
in little cheats against death,  
in day, with her daughters near,  
secure in their necessary touches,  
her feet on a grandson's knee,  
he massaging her calves.  
No pain, she says.  
I feel like I am floating out of my body.

There is a temple in Las Vegas,  
on the slopes of Sunrise Mountain.  
She desired to go up to this temple with her family  
before her passing.

I sat, my back against a cool, white pillar.  
In the east, the moon was red in eclipse.  
My daughter reclined in my lap,  
chin on her chest, appraising the moon.  
Sleep, she said.  
The moon crossed behind cloud.  
Come back, she said.