

# After an Illness

**A**FTER AN ILLNESS half the world has caught,  
I sit beneath the overcast to let the half-light  
And some words—wrangled (from notepads) into some kind  
of worldly order—  
Practise a little healing upon me. Overhead a small plane passes,  
propellers tugging it reluctantly south.  
In the hedge and in the rainy gutters, sparrows make scavenging  
over into  
A descant part. And now: the piping of the crimson rosella,  
and an elderly voice on the phone next door;  
the sustained iambic flutter, like a siren,  
Of a bird I can't name, and a van clatters,  
empty, through the potholes the weather's  
made in Station Street.  
Sometimes there is a wealthy kind of nothing you get to do—rich  
and tart and soft  
As a medieval Persian dish, the lamb slow cooked since someone  
rose at five to set it in the saffron and the onion—  
And I'm doing it now. More than half of what life's worth happens  
In such extended rests. And it seems to me there's dignity  
entailed in turning up, in licensing  
the world to find you waiting,  
Bowed in anticipation of whatever part  
of the gravity and godliness that constitute  
the real world,  
The real world wants you in. A solitary black cockatoo sculls by  
Now making a sacrament out of its perpetual lament.  
At year's end last year, Barry Lopez died, and

Still that can't be true. Midyear, Don, who will surely round  
The corner from the post office next time I'm in town  
and apologise for letting  
so much time pass. And then

At Christmas, Joan Didion, who was ninety, it seemed,  
since she was forty a hundred years ago,  
And whose writing will always be new. My mother is ill, my father  
Fails. I have entered those years when those you love  
begin to leave. The space they open  
is a crowd  
Of spices and hauntings and grim hopes. But before we finish,  
let us be sure to begin.

Like these I've learned from, earned my life from,  
and like the crocus violet in the arid field,  
let me begin

At last to open, against the past, against  
the feeling that one's left it all too late;  
Let me open, each moment, to more of all there is. Let me make  
A living beginning, minute after minute,  
never finished until I'm truly done.

Above, the plane again, like an outboard in a backwater, and  
the overcast breaks up.  
Below, the golden spaniel sprawls across my feet  
in summer sunlight that spreads  
now like a happy chance gone viral.