

thanked my father. They thanked him and thanked him, and then they thanked God.

It took nine minutes for the ambulance to get there, and my father told the paramedics they sure took their sweet time. He would not take his hands out of Georgie-Pie, not until there was a stretcher under Georgie-Pie's back and a needle in his arm and a white cotton blanket pulled up to his waist; not until a paramedic presented a sealed IV bag and a small metal clamp, which he held up for my father. "Satisfied?" he asked.

Then my father said, "OK. Take this fellow to Mercy. Not Cook County — Mercy. Under the care of Dr. Morrison. He's on tonight."

The paramedic agreed but said he couldn't let any of "these people" ride in the ambulance. When my father said what the hell, the paramedic said policy was policy and to take it up with his boss.

After Georgie-Pie and the ambulance had gone, the loud man and the man who looked like a woman told us, "We know the way to Mercy. It's late. You just get your boy home."

In the car I thought about my father and me almost leaving too soon. I thought about my mother, waiting for us at home. I thought about quick jabs with sharp knives, where we go if we never wake up, and Georgie-Pie.

"I want to go to Mercy, too," I told my father.

"Son," my father started to say.

"We have to make sure he's all right," I said. "We *have* to." And my father turned the car around.

At Mercy my father talked with Dr. Morrison, and we found the loud man and the man who looked like a woman in the waiting room, drinking cups of black coffee.

They stood up, and my father told them, "George is resting now. He looks very good."

"Can we take him?" asked the man who looked like a woman.

"Not yet," my father said. "He needs to be monitored to make sure there's no sign of infection. He should go home tomorrow."

The loud man said, "Well, we don't know what to say."

We all shook hands and wished each other well. When my father and I got to the elevator, he told me there was something he wanted me to see.

"But it might upset your mother," he said.

And I understood.

We went down to the basement, and that's where my father showed me the cadaver. The name on the tag was John Doe. My father and I put on masks and gloves and stood next to John Doe. Then my father said, "I'm sorry, Son," but I didn't know if he meant the long night, or John Doe, or the new lump in my mother's breast. I wanted to tell my father how glad I was for the night, to tell him how good it felt to save somebody.

Then he asked me if I thought it was time to put John Doe away, and it was. ■

To The One-Legged Homeless Woman In The Pouring Rain

TEDDY MACKER

When I passed you on my way home
I didn't think about you
nor feel a hairsbreadth of sympathy.

I was talking about someone at work,
how she'd pissed me off in an e-mail.
"She's so curt," I think I said.

It wasn't until hours later
while looking at the sky,
a sky whose size unsteadied me,
that I started thinking of you,
you and others like you,
all the human beings on this planet
suffering simultaneously,
the hundreds, thousands, millions. . . .
How incomprehensible, I thought,
standing there on my covered porch

while you stood on one leg
on a traffic median,
hungry and homeless
in a ruined side of Baltimore
in the pouring rain.