PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL

PROLOGUE

In the summer of 1955, when I was eighteen, I worked as a nurses' aide in the Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital, in New Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

It was before the time of psychoactive drugs, and knowledge of Alsheimer's disease, and care for the abilities of the "developmentally challenged".

And so these old dark hospital buildings of brick, wood, and barred windows, retained together the "mentally retarded", the "senile", and the "insane".

The experiences, images, and feelings of my time there stayed strongly with me, and bits of verse began to form. Finally, in 1989, it was time to bring to fruition, to heal, to complete. Some polishing, clarifying, has been done since then. But mostly the work has stayed in my "bottom drawer" until now, when I present this piece to you. [This prologue was written in 1998 when I self-published]

Names used are fictitious. "Dr. Cumberland" was the chief psychiatrist and head of the hospital.

And so, this story, these stories, separate, and one, past, and continuing.

Graveyard shift, Fear pacing tall and thin
Before arms wrapped stars lawn trees hands locked water breeze crossed tight to

freedom breathing shoulders

space restraining chaos.

Behind Behind brick bars red

ribbons

Heavy I yellow ribbons Leave weave

unlock

enter lock bright me silver Inside braids

But flowing I have the key down

What of those who have what if I did

not 1 2

Tiny white-haired pinkness

Sad forever.

Her head towering above me my eyes meeting the middle

Touch sing

I prod her along

Everybody has a laughing place gently but firmly just for her to the cubicles.

then

her eyes If she resists

smile	with my two small hands
	I clamp her arms
and perhaps	behind her back
this small	and tame an Amazon
light	
will stay	
awhile 3	4
*****************	***************
Large stolid	Nursie! Nursie!
she	Get me! Get me!
rocks cornered	
foot to foot	Steel-walled bed.
arms weaving	Small mugwump
rhythms	shrill-ly bouncing
weaving high	head tossing
weaving low	calling bobbing
over over	_
under over	fingers
over over	flat long
	knife-edged.
Nothing wrong with me!	
Only here because	skin
I wouldn't marry the damn	flaky scales.
doctor!	Cha dagan't gara
over ever	She doesn't care.
over over under over	She laughs. We love her.
over over 5	We love her.
***************************************	-
There is a troop	Long gangly
SiX	all legs and arms
that stand all day	a great white spider
each in hospital gown	that snuffles
hands clasping wrists	and smiles and smiles
hands gripping elbows	
heads hung	Touch her shoulder
silent gentle	Toilet time
never stirring	and snuffling
	smiling
Until one	she slithers
somehow strays	from the bed
beyond the wooden door	to the wooden floor
into the empty hall	
and stands now	and hospital gowned
in her brief grey gown	heels and hands
wrists clasped head hung	bare bums her way
	past the beds
yet proud	to the cubicles.
sentinel guard	Dut if comotimes
on the floor	But if sometimes I lift her
on the floor	
by her side	snuffling and carry her
	and carry ner

two	so light
large brown rolls 7	laughing she pats my face and cuddles.
	The professionals
*****************	do not approve. 8
Mrs. Dragovitch, chief aide	Toilet Time
just begs for a rhyme.	
Squat round-tub refugee	Nudge the quiet ones
from some grey camp guard she waddles	hands clasping wrists hands gripping elbows
and pushes	heads hung
and pokes the gentle ones	gently
in the stomach.	shove move stop
Oh a silamila amatakan asasas	shove move stop
She silently snatches covers from the sleeping blind	to the cubicles.
then shoves them	Turn one
groping wildly before her	lift her gown sit her down.
to the cubicles.	Sit Her down.
	Repeat
She grins and says	Repeat
they are not sick.	Repeat
Yet she shies away from	Return
an aimlessly waved slipper.	stand wipe
She cannot understand	each one
the madness and is afraid.	Herd them
and is allaid.	nudge move stop
Still if she pokes that gentle	nudge move stop
one more time I'll poke her	nudge move
hard	stop.
round tub and she'll go	So back in place
Woosh!	they stand
9	gentle
**********	never stirring. 10
Mrs. Donaldson	Dorothy comes to mop the floors.
bound in her bed	She talks to the Air Force Boys
for safety	directing operations for
wriggles free	saving the Pussy Cat Girls
shatters her hip.	from Cumberland's Crooks.
At meal times	She replies sharply
she will not touch	to my Good Morning.
the offered spoon	Says there was an army
until assured	of little men
the cows are milked	fighting under her bed

and		all night	
all the children fed.		and she couldn't sleep	
	11	for hearing the bones crunch.	12
******************	******	******************************	*****
Suddenly there is .		Annie helps.	
a screeching		Thirty-two	
careening through the ward		here since	
a gentle		sixteen	
is racing		homey	
screaming		smiling	
clawing doors		and almost	
doubling over		able	
shrieking		to care for	
shattering the air		herself.	
fleeing demons		neroen.	
shaking window bars		She sorts flowers	
_		sent from funerals	
smashing a fist between		sent nom funerals	
splintering glass.		Chur places	
T 1		Shw places	
Then		clean sheets	
it is finished.		ready	
she is quiet			
gentle again.		She feeds	
		patients	
From the hand		better than some	
held silently			
before her		Annie cannot	
		tell or explain	
slow		but "Annie knows"	
		so nurses	
blood		follow	
		when she leads	
drops			
u. opo		And	
	13	"Annie's happy here"	
	10	Aime 3 happy here	
		for her	
		ever	14
*********	******	***********	*****
When the beds are		BEGINNING	
cleaned for lunch		2201111110	
and serving's just begun		Dinner	
		Ward C	
every day there's trouble			
with Granny Mackelson		Bed 3	
		Small silver	
Every day the trouble is		eighty-two	
a little number two		sightless	
she says that it is			
in her bed		so proper	
and what is she to do?		and correct.	
It's in my bed.		She was	
I don't know what it is.		a schoolmarm.	

all night

and

It's in my bed. Place her tray prop her with pillows And every day the nurses say guide her hand they'll help her showing naming each food. when they're through and so she eats her food with hands "Thank you" she says all brown Precisely and with number two. 15 doesn't remember. 16 **MIDDLE** By her bed **END** white-nightied she stands 2:00 a.m. hands clasped gasping. blind eyes waiting The pillows propping her asthma neatly do no good. "Would you like to go to the washroom?" Sit behind her hold rock her "If you please." to breathe through this final night. precisely. But on the floor a puddle 17 18 glistens **TERMINAL WARD** Slight figure worn dressing gown bent left hand Long narrow three sides windowed locked between separated from others by protecting her female place a dark hall tunnel. right hand reaching flailing warding off Twenty beds dangers her wide eyes see. The end of the road. "J'ai peur J'ai peur" $\Lambda\Lambda\Lambda\Lambda\Lambda\Lambda\Lambda\Lambda\Lambda$ she pleads all day every day Aging lady sits ****** humped in a slat-sided bed hair askew hands Wheelchair her waving calling "Bring a soaker, Missie! sheet wrapped Bring a soaker!" into the tub room Give her a towel Lift her she shoves between her legs lower her so thin to catch the dripping away

of her time.	into the warm
	receiving water
	Cradle her
	most carefully
	or she will just
	slide under
•	19 and be gone. 20
*************	******************
	skin hair
The lady has	bones and
the look and air	
of a brilliant	Bed sores.
research scientist.	angry volcanoes
	deep red
She asks for	white-rimmed
her husband	growing larger on
then cries and says	heels hips
it doesn't matter.	buttocks shoulders.
Hold her	Wash salve
stroke her head	Encircle with
and the stroking hand	small rubber rings.
3	Her body floats
goes down	on childish toys.
into her head.	,
	Cover gently
Hair covers	She will not last long.
the absence	one name of the second of the
of skull	Care for the next.
and brain.	Glance.
	Stillness.
Car accident.	She has gone.
Her husband died.	one had gener
	Six inches away
It took many doctors	I was not told.
many hours	No trumpets sounded.
many mane	no trampoto countou.
to save her	Alone
	unknown
they say	unheld
	she died.
	3.10 4.04.
	Tend her
	Wash the empty hollows.
	Wrap her safely
	in her cool white shroud.
-	**************************************
Twenty	beds
Twenty	

Twenty

mouths to feed faces to wash

bodies to tend again again

Pull back sheets be swamped by waves of steaming stinking wetness

Twenty beds
Twenty people
Twenty personalities
Twenty women
Twenty lives
Twenty females
dying.

Bring a soaker Missie