

APHASIA

Grace Guilliams

It only took three months of radiation,
 For seventy eight years of life
 To catch up to you,
To be displayed by the sluggishness in
Your movements, by your detached gaze,
By the jagged rhythm of your breath,

They said this year's garden
 Would be your last,
That soon you won't be able to drive
Your Chevy, let alone be able to
Stand for more than a few
 Moments.

I wish it was happening slowly.
I wish you were fading—at least then I could
 Hold onto you,
Just for a while longer.
The lesions on your brain invaded
My favorite part of you.
Your illness
 Infected your mind,
Made you recognizable only in appearance.

It ravaged your Broca's area;
 It silenced you.

Of all the ways you could deteriorate,
 This is the way?
Sitting here now, frustrated,
 Wishing I could at least ask,
 “How are you?”
Wishing such a simple question
Could be answered by you
Because it's the first time I've ever
 Actually cared how someone is.

Grandma and I sit on floral cushions,
Staring in opposite directions,
 I at the broken grandfather clock,
 Her at worn cheery wood;

I feel her blue gaze on me.
Violent, successive shudders roll down my back and
 I'm embarrassed when she begins to hush
 My tears—*she* is consoling *me*?
She's the one taking care of you,
The one guessing what you're trying to
 Spit out.
Communication for you has morphed into
A frustrating game of charades:
Except both players guess what you're
 Trying to say,
 Endlessly searching for something
 That once happened so easily,
I pity you.
I pity her.
And, right now, I pity myself too, because

When you walk in to greet me
After your mid-morning nap
 I can't squeeze you—
I don't want to hurt your chest
Now that there's a foreign object
 Underneath your sallow skin,
Pumping you with fluids.
You wrap your arms around me
 Too weakly,
Too briefly to savor your wordless affection.

It's the first time you've been the one
 To pull away first;

Hands freckled by age and life
Cradle my supple cheeks;
 I can't see my reflection in your eyes today.