

Pub Crawls

Peter Marcus

In an hour long past midnight, we'd stroll away from the stately habitations and sit in a non-descript Irish bar on Lex to conduct a post-mortem on another bleak day. Though the house-wines were screw-top dreck, my sister downed four half carafes of white while I pounded Guinness pint by pint. What was there to recall about those nights except that they were ghastly. Mother, a pallid waste, gasping as she strained to suck the ever-thinning air. Our family, like Himalayan mountaineers who'd come to realize dying is also an ascent. When we brought her in for her decisive visit to her nonchalant oncologist, we sensed his impatience—wasting precious time on an invalid with a doom-and-gloom prognosis. A journey those last weeks from impudence to apathy and surely no more strength to reminisce. By then we'd reassessed what triumph is: not fighting for an inert life but a savage giving-up and in. We both admitted being tempted to taste her high-grade morphine, which she hardly took, fearing madcap visions followed by an overdose, but we didn't have the nerve and merely languished on our barstools, discussing her brief verdicts and terse reviews of Broadway shows and art-house films at Lincoln Plaza. "Awful," "stupid," "terrible," "I hated it." A lexicon fitting for a cancer death. And yet, regarding *her life* journey, we never knew *her truth*—a specialist she was in keeping secrets from herself. Whenever father left her bedside, one of us would spoon her atop the wildly flowering duvet, while the other sibling stood gazing blankly at the panoramic view of remote control sailboats circling the pond, daydreaming of those raucous sea lions gliding through the waters at the zoo.