

The Body

by Ginnah Howard

In this morning's email he tells her *you're going to enjoy your new gas-fire stove, not having to haul in wood. No need to get up in the night to throw on a log. Even if the power goes off, it'll still fire up.* He and Judy like to sit in his study by their Vermont Castings...*Red enamel. Did you get a colored one too?...to have a drink before dinner, watch the glow.* Judy is his second wife and between every line he writes about her, pulses his gratitude for living with someone so solid, so sane. And often somewhere in the email, after he's responded to all her news, he tells her about his body: what the lymphoma is up to this month. They have been friends for fifty years. Even for a lonely time in their thirties, tried out being lovers. At sixteen, they got drunk together, commiserated: his girlfriend, Melinda; her boyfriend, Paul. O love, O heartless love. Vermouth. After a basketball game, his parents away, her sick, lying on the bathroom floor most of the night. First it was the lump in his neck in 1993: removed, the hope they'd gotten it all. A few years later, the lumps in the groin: they hadn't. This past April he wrote: *Well, it looks like I'll be having a stem-cell transplant after all...Two days after the catheter I'll have a massive infusion of Cytoxin...The purpose is to "mobilize" the stem cells by scaring them out of the bone marrow into the blood stream, where they can later be collected and frozen for future use. ...The drill goes like this: 4 days of high dose chemo, 2 days rest, then the melting and re-infusion of the stored stem cells. If all goes well, the stem cells will gradually begin making new red cells, white cells and platelets...* Now it's September, and he's just completed 18 rounds of "mop-up" radiation. *Next big step will be CAT and PET scans, probably in early November, to see whether the stem-cell transplant + radiation has gotten rid of the lymphoma for now.* Meanwhile there's his stepson's wedding next week, the night-before party at the farm, with a blue grass band, croquet, badminton, a catered barbecue. She remembers the farm: where the two couples spent the night

after their senior ball. She remembers rising early, after confusing hours of silently resisting, climbing the ridge in her white shorts and red T-shirt, looking down on the house, everyone sleeping. All the while singing, "I'm through with love." He later married the girl; she later married the boy. Years later, and all the things that go with that, her husband killed himself; his wife ended up in a McLean halfway house. *Know what I mean?* one will write to the other, when the present has a lot to do with the past. *Yes.*

