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Writing the Body

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WRITING THE BODY

The missionary man asked so I told him when he asked that the vase with a lid was an urn and that inside it were the ashes of my arm. He might have noticed other things, like the ebony hippo or the sunken boat in the water-color, but, chat, well, he was mostly shivering and chattering from shivering and just there since he had come to the door as they do, and shivering noticed the thing with the gold rim and the gilt fishes and he was looking for an opening and asking questions about whether you're born again so I asked him in—it was 3 with a wind chill—and offered a coffee, but no. He looked around and there was a grey suit under his parka. The bathrobe over my jeans and sweater hid some things, including bronchitis.

So I wondered whether if I was born again would I have two arms because if I was healed in the shoulder part, I still wasn't whole, and I was coughing too, so I lit up a cigarette. He wasn't very good looking, though. If his parka had had a plug like a car, I would have offered some electricity since he'd take no coffee. But maybe it was the cold that started him coughing and I offered a smoke instead but he declined and asked again if I was born again and was my soul prepared and I asked if he thought women should teach in churches. He started in about Paul and I could tell this was the foot he didn't want to start off on so I offered to cut it off. Then he left and I went back to the crossword puzzle.

I had this thing in my right side and it started as a pain in my forearm and I thought "Grammie, Where are you now?" because she was ambidextrous. And though she was dead by then, I still had a newspaper photo of her as the Valentine Queen at Good Shepherd Home on my refrigerator. It was there when she was alive and it was there when she was dead; it's there still. But I don't have a happy holiday portrait of my arm in a funny hat to put on the fridge.

Once I saw a magazine article about women having portraits taken of themselves naked—not that they considered themselves beautiful, but that there was the body, the parts of them they knew and lived in, and the aesthetic of it wasn't in some objective model-type standard but more that well here is a female body and it has scars sometimes and places gravity has marked like

God and I thought about doing that—this was me—at some point, though I didn't want a witness in the photographer. It would have only been for me, this scared and scarred and wilting thing that I loved and wanted to hug and rock to sleep, this body, this me, this flesh dying daily. There was more of me then.

Someone else's hug isn't enough isn't enough because he might wrap you now in some delicious embrace all warm and liquid as honey on your pores on all your pores but then there's no hugging your arm when it's there in ash in an urn. It was a lovely arm and had a mole, several moles, small ones on the forearm, on my forearm that I still love. If I still had it, that arm, it would be like a toe, something there all me just me and with it I might have pulled out my Bible and beat the evangelist over the head. God saved me from that. My left is awkward and frail. Maybe that's salvation, but I don't think so.