

1985

Last Elegy

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Recommended Citation

Berg, Stephen. "Last Elegy." *The Iowa Review* 15.1 (1985): 86-87. Web.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.3185>

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Last Elegy · *Stephen Berg*

Surgeons were cutting a hole
in my father's skull
with one of those saws that takes
a plug out of bone,
and they were slicing open
a big lump on my spine;
the rooms of my house
were higher than they are, I
strolled through them like a giant,
unaware of the meaning,
in the dream I can't forget.
The day before he died
we were at the shore watching
a golf match on TV,
yelling and joking. His drawn
gray face barely showed
any sense of being here,
any desire to live.
The little money he made,
the failure he thought he was
intensified his mood
after the heart attack.
The sky blew flat, gray, smeary,
like his unfulfilled soul.
A few fly-like figures
walked on the cold beach. Millie,
Clair, Margot, Mom and I
didn't know how to stop his
staring out of nothing into nothing
so we watched hard
Nicklaus miss two easy putts,

and other big names
tee off with that amazingly
fluid swing they all have
then take the soothing walk down
the fairway to the ball,
that whole world manicured, green.
Well, this happens too:
with money you left me
I put your ashes in a clay urn
under three red bushes and a flat stone.
To say "I love you"
meant "I know I'm dying,"
but you said it.
At least I think I heard you
whisper it. Or was it to yourself?
I kept my eyes on the screen.