

# Resuscitation

## *Toward a Theatre Piece*

by [Evelyn Hooven](#) (June 2021)



*Old Women of Arles*, Paul Gauguin, 1888

*Louca, a physician in her mid-30s*  
*Nell, a patient in her 80s*

### Louca

At first I was letting myself be persuaded,

but soon found it was right for me:  
physician for old folks, geriatrician.  
The patient volume compensates  
for skimpy Medicare and—yes—  
they're respectful, compliant, and grateful.  
For most, I'm the last doctor they'll have—  
close second to God.

I couldn't predict how sheerly off-putting  
I'd find life in the slow lane. Even the ones  
who aren't slowed down mentally seem,  
with their canes or walkers,  
to inch their way, dreariness guaranteed.  
And after they've been weighed,  
ascending, descending the scale with help,  
vital signs seem like a misnomer.  
Yesterday I had to wait,  
only a moment,  
but I'm the one  
who should be waited for.

One patient, no mental impairment,  
only her walk is slow,  
left one question on her  
Medicare form blank,  
the issue of losing consciousness:  
"Do you want to be resuscitated?"  
She wrote in the margin  
"I'd like to find out more,  
think much more."

The next time,  
she brought a book I had written  
with good assistance from graduate fellows.  
My seminar on Death and Dying  
seemed far away,  
as did the book itself.  
It got me my promotion.

She'd purchased the book,  
read it, asked for my signature  
inside the cover  
and had written questions.  
I couldn't summon the detail.  
"We're on the next patient's time."  
I said. She closed the book.

I began to see that the best compensation  
in my slow-lane practice had been  
*the thrill of power over life and death.*  
Absolute assumption not to be  
diminished. If that fades,  
I'd have to change my specialty.

Though she lived a distance from  
my office in the hospital,  
she managed, day before Thanksgiving,  
and slow-walking with a cane,  
to arrive on time— just.  
I had an important luncheon  
appointment and needed  
for her to be early.  
When the physician's assistant  
Appeared with cardiogram  
apparatus, I turned him away.  
"I was on time," Nell said.  
I said, "Well do it next visit,  
When there's less holiday congestion."

The next time, she brought a poem  
she'd composed about death.  
Could she be presenting herself  
As a fellow author,  
My *colleague*?

Nell

I thought I'd let you know  
Some of my feelings about dying.  
If I can stay mentally sound,  
I want resuscitation.

Louca

Oh . . . ? I advise against it.

Nell

But in your book . . .

Louca

Those cases were exceptional.  
One was younger—

Nell

It's still my only life.  
I decided on resuscitation.  
I'd like for someone to revive me—  
But I don't want it to be you.

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**Evelyn Hooven** graduated from Mount Holyoke College and received her M.A. from Yale University, where she also studied at The Yale School of Drama. A member of the Dramatists' Guild, she has had presentations of her verse dramas at

several theatrical venues, including *The Maxwell Anderson Playwrights Series* in Greenwich, CT (after a state-wide competition) and *The Poet's Theatre* in Cambridge, MA (result of a national competition). Her poems and translations from the French and Spanish have appeared in *Parnassus: Poetry in Review*, *ART TIMES*, *Chelsea*, *The Literary Review*, *THE SHOp: A Magazine of Poetry* (in Ireland), *The Tribeca Poetry Review*, *Vallum* (in Montreal), and other journals, and her literary criticism in Oxford University's *Essays in Criticism*.

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