



Source: Paul McGeough, 'Bogged too deep for a clean exit', *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 09/12/06.
Tags: [corporeality](#)
Writer/s: [Cynthia Troup](#)

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For your considerate science

In a small room, a woman with crippled hands writes. She has made a decision, and knows to write it down, so as to wedge it into the future; so as to make some allowance for a restful silence later.

I can no longer see and cannot count the bruises and scabs that grow softly florid through the night. You will have names for them.

Someone might determine too the real source of the throbbing like needle jabs through all my limbs that exhausts me, hides me from a great deal of the world, undoes now even my sitting at the window. I shuffle, and sigh and, worse, my emotions come to me thinly. Thinly and lagging, as though each subtlety, while willing to be provoked, were tired too, and worried perhaps about wastefulness. But please understand: I have never been complacent. It may be of use to know as well that I have maintained good if random habits; with walking outdoors, and with vitamins, making lists, examining my conscience, smelling the roses, greeting others cheerfully.

As I have aged, in conversation I have seemed to hear them—the others—become more chaotically forthright about what is lacking between the ideal and the facts. It is unlikely, I am aware, that the decrepitude of my body is being brought home to me by the cumulative effect of that, over a lifetime.

When my three-year-old nephew boasted that his head ached, I asked him, 'what will you do?', and straight away he replied, 'Take it off'. The exceptional is wanted for this giddy nephew, as the exceptional was wanted for me, and for yourselves, surely. I did live a long time believing that I should want the exceptional for myself; that is, for the private and secretly fearful creature that I was.

At the stark moment of compulsion and elation when a child is born it becomes subject to gravity, of course: frail or fierce, being and body become substantial—'of weight'. From then on the trick is to discern in substantiality lightness. I have learned, at least, that the trick is to recollect that we are mostly water, and therefore able to float; able to desist from everything but the experience of floating, or falling, or at least leaning to the surface where the light ripples, slides about, picks us out over and over again, and turns us and whatever wretchedness we discover towards itself. So I fix on the beautiful flash of the needle.

(With reference to floating, once I could have invented some witticism about Formaldehyde, but I am sure that your methods are much advanced since I saw anatomical remnants brightly suspended in jars.)

I first thought to catalogue for you my various pains, having in mind a kind of medical consultation that might be filed with your Faculty or Department beforehand. On reading what I have awkwardly managed to describe I notice that I have been unable to separate the things of the body from those of other, freer impressions of being alive. I would like to assume that those with a medical qualification tend to be distracted less by such impressions—distracted less, for example, by the impression of others' untold loneliness.

Your Faculty may not want it; this still-insistent body has swollen, gone fumbling, fractious and dry. But for what your considerate science may still find of interest by its hollowing out and dispersal, science may have it. With thanks.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Cynthia Troup.