

Ellen Collins, age 37: skin graft

Ellen Collins was admitted to Bellevue Hospital, October 1871, for a burn from kerosene oil. After 5 months' treatment the wound assumed the appearance seen in the illustration. On March 10, 1872, I immersed an amputated leg in hot water and began grafting from it. Thirty grafts were applied on the right side and covering a vertical space five by four and a-half inches, and almost all succeeded. March 23. Being unable to take the amputated limb immediately to my patient, I wrapped it in flannel and placed it behind a coil of steam pipes; beginning grafting *one hour and thirty-five minutes* after the operation. About one hundred grafts were applied, eighty-nine successful ones. An acute pleurisy then set in and caused her death on *June 22*, when everything promised success. She had received in all over 1500 grafts in less than a year. (The preceding is abridged from a text by the patient's doctor, Geo. A. Van Wagenen MD, the former house surgeon at Bellevue Hospital, New York City, New York).

I tried to rhyme her breasts with bits of skin
and patch her broken meters back to song.
But pain stitched on and on. No art that I'd enjoin
could lyric back her breasts from fire or mend
such loss—or make her husband kind:

he'd "never love a chest of scars."
So I was left to wooing with scalpels
and grafts, salves and sutures,
and the legs I'd warmed from cadavers.
Soon I'd learned her body like a lover.

But after the months of grafting,
so much intimacy without romance,
her life blistered with grief and grievance.
She'd take no more of my artless crafting,
and all my love and all my skill flamed to nothing.

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Endurance and Suffering is available in North America at www.photoeye.com and in Europe at <http://anamorfose.be/>

A note from the Humanities' editor

You may have noticed that The Left Atrium has morphed, in this issue, into Humanities. The change in name highlights systemic changes throughout the section that are designed to make it a more accessible and pertinent source of inspiration, reflection and insight for physicians.

The 7 departments within the section have been synthesized into Reviews, Creative Works and Essays. The section will be rooted in Reviews, primarily of books, but also new media and art (in all its delightful permutations). The Creative

Works department will showcase original works of art, including poetry, short fiction, narrative medicine accounts, fine art and photography. Essays will explore a range of subjects, such as history, anthropology, ethics, culture and sociology, and will include profiles of inspiring people.

Other changes to the print and on-line humanities section will be introduced throughout 2009.

The Left Atrium was launched in January 1999 with the stated purpose of conveying "the art and humanities aspects of medicine to our readers and,

in particular, providing sustenance for the practice of this art through contemplation." A decade later that commitment remains unchanged.

I would like to thank everyone who participated in the brainstorming sessions that led to these changes. I welcome your comments as well as your submissions for possible publication (for details see www.cmaj.ca/authors/preparing.shtml).

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