

## The mathematics of Crohn disease

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Curled up like a sow bug in retreat, map in hand,  
he is calculating the distance from his couch

to the store, circling the pinpoints  
of known or surmised available bathrooms.

He's assaying the time between bouts  
of seizing, ignited guts. It's been days

since he felt wind sting his eyes, tears  
being his secret talisman of health.

His work hours are honed and divided.  
Refusing taboo, he's informed his students

the square root of disease is mutation  
and *mutation is a statistical entity*,

though it *doesn't imply disease...*

the opposite of "*mutant*" is not "*normal*"  
but "*wild type*." Not a badger or wolverine,

but wild as in preponderance of the similar,  
as in, the many three-leaf clovers.

With luck, what can't be controlled is kept  
out of sight. He tries to escape

rank memories that shrink him  
to a baby: a caretaker handling him roughly,

her nose wrinkled and breath held,  
a voice mewling eeww, memories that cinch him

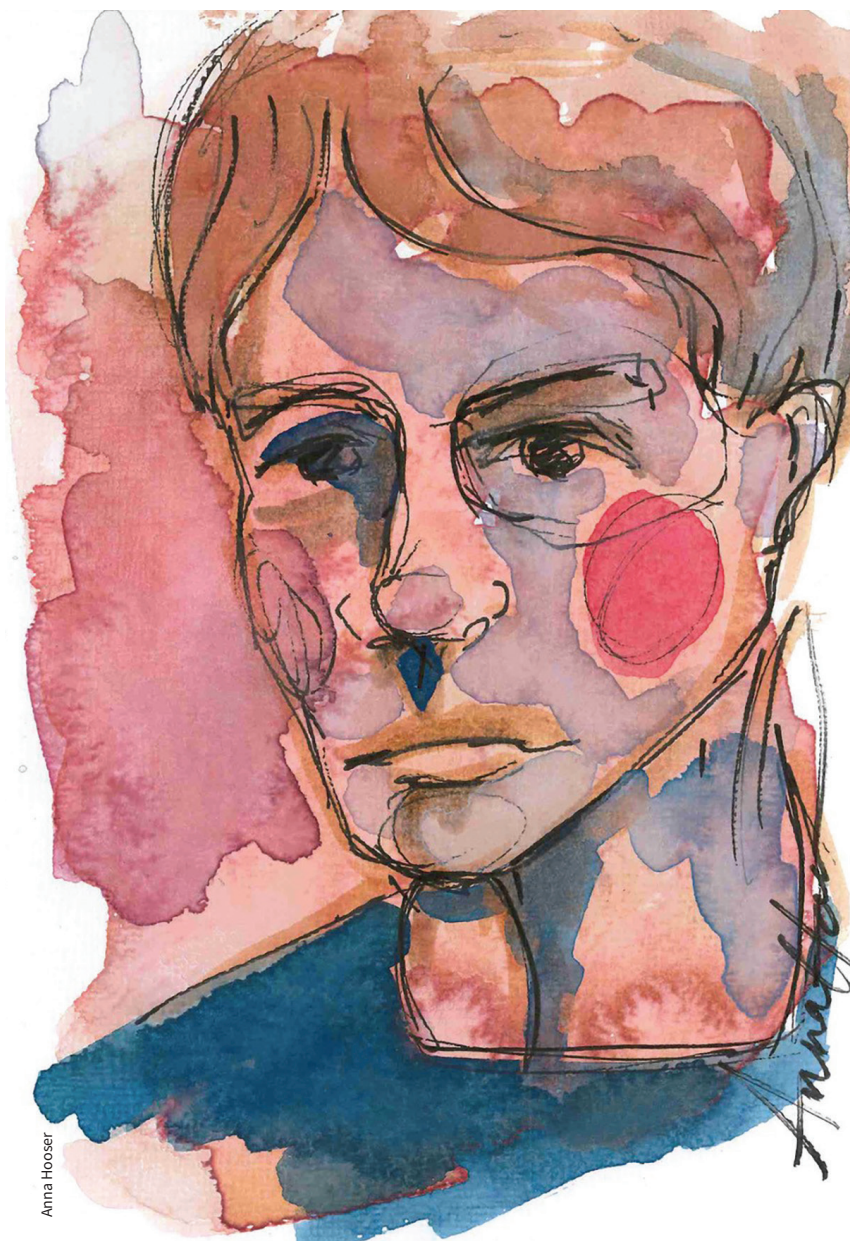
into a corner shrouded in shame.  
So much that is indigestible,

like the soil from coiled ropes of his colon—

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Quoted words and phrases and those in italics are taken from *The gene: an intimate history* by Siddhartha Mukherjee (Scribner, 2016).

This article has not been peer reviewed.



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