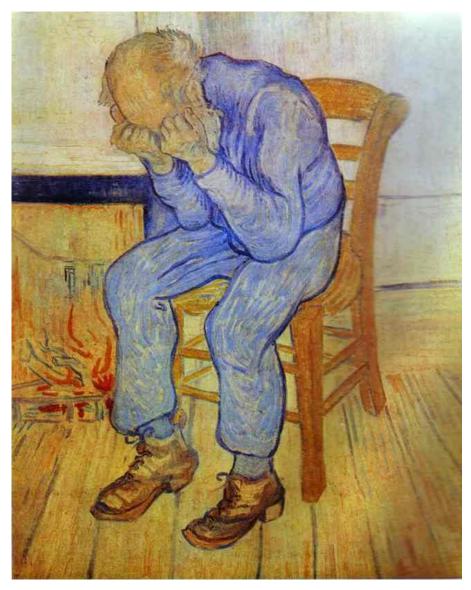
## Her Light: At a Memorial Service

by Evelyn Hooven (December 2017)



At Eternity's Gate, Vincent Van Gogh, 1890

The last time I saw her Shira came to supervision, saying, "There's a man alone in his car Right near—a kind of shoulder." I said, "That's part of the lot next door, It's been sold but people still park there." "I saw his face-such despair," She continued. I stopped myself from saying "What's that to you?" Before our session was over We saw what seemed to be fire. Shira raced to where It was starting, used her phone, Then kept on packing and tossing snow. The window seemed to come down Without shattering, then An ambulance's wail, Glimpse of a stretcher, Doors about to close Not without her. There was time left To our session. I remember wanting To say to her, "Why should you go

Where they don't know you? And where was your **Professional distance?** Every day in bedrooms, Bathrooms, cars, garages Someone chooses disaster. For this man, it may be suicide-The choice is his. Why should you Phone for an ambulance, Be a stranger's keeper? I had thought of you As protégée, apprentice-Not any more. . . . That you're almost poor Hasn't made you practical; I'll write an extra-adequate letter." I got very busy-In swift succession. Clusters of meetings, Conferences, seminars. If there was a common undertone

Among the candidates-A non-vocal presence-It went something like this: "History's boring, Ideas take time-a real luxury As costs of study Mount out of reach." "Don't bother us much. There must be, for success, Simple apparatus (A key or a code)-Just deliver it. To thank you We'll do anything it takes." Not appearing quite professional, Rescuing a stranger Began, for me, to seem Weightless complaints.

I tried to locate her, no luck.

Might she come back Even to retrieve Her winter jacket, her backpack? I kept them in the garage And, though it wasn't my custom, Left those doors open. Over-scheduled again-Hectic: the more we confer The more we hear of the same Well-defended systems-Thoughts like uniforms: This makes me comfortable, That's not a good fit. And of course: Target people who pay well And are not very ill. They want up the ladder Further and faster And for displeasure To disappear. We could get on retainer For Malady Prevention

Or Maintenance Lightly. And what shall we call them-Subsidizers? Customers? Now what comes to mind Is a conference Shira attended (Not so long ago) That included the question Of whether we see Patients or clients. Shira tended not to speak much But had this to say: "I'm not sure how this translates To a name for the ones Who come to us, But I think the ancient Greeks Were on to something When they called the honor Of being trusted With healing of this order, When they called it sacred." A total really dense silence.

The word *sacred* Acted like a stun-gun. It was as though they'd fainted And had to be revived. Then: "Sacred's for clerics, Sacred's for saints"-Nothing, of course, to do with us. Soon business-as-usual Went something like this: I'm repelled by suffering But, as a trained and documenting perceiver, I expect substantial reward. The week I qualified I dreamed of wheelbarrows And little red wagons At all my doors Each one filled Beyond the brim With dollars And radiant coins-Of course clients fill them. More seminars

Brief and smaller, Nearly personal Or were they pseudo-naive? Opinions differ, Though we did hear: "Why can't love be painless? Some lives may go through A vale of tears-not mine." "I try never to become Bewildered or lost-Where would that lead? What would it yield?" Though we want much more We'll start, as a prime good, With painless. Seminars, Conferences Seemed to merge. Where did we convene? It's hard to be precise. Each resonance or shadow

Assumes its vehemence.

I can't always be precise About who said what But, as we know, voices And impressions take hold Or take their toll: Someone said, "I turned away When I shouldn't have, Didn't want to bother, Thought I was being professional When I merely left things out; Love and work both suffered As I tried not to." I might be the one Who said that. Then, from someone Unmistakably in pain, came this: "All around us Self-promotion, Ambition Without a sense of calling. (Pseudo-compassion pays just as well.)

Could there be a force That tries to manage us Into a game for the heartless Or callous-A chilling game With a power-point format And nobody's blessing? That may be Reality-It's only that I can't stand it." She wept uncontrollably. We waited for the anguish To be over But had nothing to offer. Shira would have known what to do. There was a pall Where there should have been light-Her light. She didn't seem to know many people, The ones she did know Remembered her well. No one knew why News came uneven

In fragments we shared: Tension, chill, underdiagnosed Condition, Blood clot-no more. Did she contract something unusual? Was it the hospital? Someone transformative, Someone irreplaceable-Our eulogies are true. . . And perhaps we move towards What she'd call The poetics of death-A name like that is nonsense I once said, but it isn't. I jotted something so quickly, Say that I speed-wrote: Our shock and grief are Measureless as she becomes Still more wonderful. No more now Except for these notes: "So long as patients feel

Merely means to our ends They cannot get well. . . . I want to feel dedicated, Not for dedicated to describe What I'm expected to discard, Or someone I used to be." This, written in her hand, Was found in her jacket pocket After she left And became What I called-then-Her stranger's keeper.

**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 have appeared in *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*. Please help <u>support</u> New English Review.

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