

After our father died, my brother promised me he wouldn't. He shook my hand on a train going home one Christmas and gave me five years,

as clearly as he promised he'd be home for breakfast when I watched him walk into that New York City autumn night. *By nine, I promise,*

and he was, he did come back. And five years later he gave me five years more. So much for the brave pride of premonition,

the worry that won't let it happen.

You know, he said, I always knew I would die young. And then I got sober,

and I thought, ok, I'm not. I'm going to see thirty and live to be an old man. And now it turns out that I am going to die.

Isn't that funny?

One day it happens: what you have feared all your life,

the unendurably specific, the exact thing. No matter what you say or do.

This is what my brother said: *Here, sit closer to the bed*

so I can see you.

Just Now

My brother opens his eyes when he hears the door click open downstairs and Joe's steps walking up past the meowing cat

and the second click of the upstairs door, and then he lifts his face so that Joe can kiss him. Joe has brought armfuls

of broken magnolia branches in full blossom, and he putters
in the kitchen looking for a big jar to put them in and finds it.

And now they tower in the living room, white and sweet, where
John can see them if he leans out from his bed which

he can't do just now, and now Joe is cleaning, *What a mess
you've left me*, he says, and John is smiling, almost asleep again.