To Mark Stewart Guin and to my brother, Ted

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The mere moving of her fork a half-inch to the right spelled dread at the dinner table.

Her furious, silent withdrawals could last for days, even weeks at a time.

Because she never spoke her mind, we never knew what this was all about.

We two boys didn't, at any rate.

Dad, home from work, went down to the basement and thumped a punching bag. That was his language.

Bum bum bum

My brother, Ted, beat on his drum.
AND I, TOO, HAD LEARNED
A WAY OF EXPRESSING MYSELF
WORDLESSLY . . . 

GETTING SICK, THAT WAS MY LANGUAGE.
I was born anxious and angry. My sinuses and digestive system didn't work as they should have.

However, Dad was a doctor. He knew what to do.

Dad prescribed the medicine for my frequent bouts with this and that.

Dad gave me shots and enemas.

Dad put me on his treatment table and "cracked my neck," our family nickname for the osteopathic manipulations he had learned in medical school.

And it was Dad the radiologist who gave me the many X-rays that were supposed to cure my sinus problems.

Hold it!
Hold still there. Sport.

Your guess is as good as mine. Better have Betty call my office. Make an appointment next week.

And hey... you're the x-ray guy. I bet we're short again. That's where we... wouldn't.
Of course David will need an operation and a few days in the hospital....

Well, naturally. Betty, we'll do that whenever it's convenient for you. There's no hurry.

And the cost of all that, Joe?

How does all of this figure, Joe?

That's all right, Joe. We'll sort it out.

Tee-riffik!
BETTY, SWEETIE, WE ALL NEED REAL SOON. I'M GOING TO KEEP IT REAL.

BETTY, WE ALL NEED REAL SOON.

WHAT HAPPENED TO OUR CHECK-UP NEXT YEAR?

HAVE DAD COME BACK FOR A CHECK-UP NEXT YEAR.
THIS WILL SURELY LEAD TO A COMPRESSION OF THE (MUFF) VERTEBRAE RESULTING IN PERMANENT DEFORMATION OF THE SPINE SUCH AS (MUFF PUFF) SCOLIOSIS OR SPONDYLOLISTHESIS. WE SEE THIS ALL THE TIME IN LATERAL CURVATURES (MUFF PUFF) AND ALSO IN THE EXAGGERATIONS OF THE ANTERO-POSTERIOR CURVES FOUND IN MOST CASES OF (MUFF PUFF) POOR POSTURE.

AS FOR YOUR STANDING POSITION, IF YOU GO ON WITH IT, YOUR LUMBAR WILL START TO FAIL TO UPHOLD YOUR DORSAL CURVE AND BOTH WILL BECOME EVASERATED.

THE RESULTANT LOROSIS AND KYPOSIS WILL GIVE YOU THAT FORWARD THRUST OF THE HEAD AND THE SUNKEN CREST (MUFF PUFF PUFF PUFF); THAT LOOK OF CHRONIC FATIGUE WHICH WE SEE SO OFTEN IN OLD PEOPLE.

THE HABIT (MUFF PUFF) YOU HAVE . . .

OF STANDING (MUFF) AND SITTING IN A (MUFF PUFF) SLOUCHED POSITION.

YOUR MOTHER HAS ASKED ME TO SPEAK TO YOU ABOUT SOMETHING WE BOTH FEEL IS IMPORTANT.

OF STANDING (MUFF) AND SITTING IN A (MUFF PUFF) SLOUCHED POSITION.
Hey there, sport! I'm guessing you think it's about time we got that cyst out of there, eh? Ha! Ha! That's just well what we're gonna do this morning. Afterwards you'll be so pretty, the girls won't leave you alone. Ha! Ha!

This here is Dr. Bluss. He'll be giving you some agent knock-out gas, so you won't feel a thing.
KIRK:

STILL A LITTLE IN THE RECOVERY ROOM, HUH?
YOU WAKE IN YOUR ROOM?

HEY!
That night, back in my hospital room. I was surprised by a visit from my mother.

"What are you doing here?"

I suppose I should have been prepared to sit on the floor and wait.
No, there's not much you can get for me.

You mean it.

But oh, wait. I forgot. You stole that from my room and burned it up.

What's going on? Christmas in February?

I mean it.

Well then, there is something you can get. I'm going to bring along the book I was referring.

I came to see if I can get you anything.

Anything you might need.

I'll get you anything you want, of course.
YOU WON'T BE DOING ANY MORE READING TOMORROW. LET ME PUT THE PILLS UNDER YOUR BEDSIDE TABLE FOR YOU, HONEY.

THANKS.

SWEET DREAMS, HUN.

OOG! I HEAR THAT ONE'S A REAL DIRTY BOOK!
GOOD MORNING, EVERYBODY. HERE'S THE BEGINNING.
ACK?
Your vocal cords make the sounds of your voice.

When I woke up from operation #2, I had only one vocal cord. And with only one vocal cord, the sound you make is...

Step inside your mouth with me for a moment. Won't you?

Careful on the tongue. It's slippery.

Now, you see down there? Those folding screens over the tunnel of your throat? Those are your vocal cords. When air flows over them, they vibrate like the strings on a cello.
Back in school, at first wildly self-conscious...

...I soon learned...

...when you have no voice, you don’t exist.

Even among my old friends I felt invisible, a shadow flickering around the edges of every event.
I began skipping classes. School was only a short walk from downtown, with its skyscrapers, coffee bars and grand movie palaces.

I sat through the same movie again and again...

A scientist takes an experimental drug that gives him X-ray vision. Driven mad by what he sees, he goes into the desert and tears out his own eyes.
At home, late at night, I began to have the sensation that I was shrinking down...

...and living inside my own mouth.

...a hot, moist cavern, in which everything I thought, every word that came into my brain, was thunderously shouted back at me.

I was scared to go up to bed, afraid that the screaming in my head would be heard by the family.
ART BECAME MY HOME. NOT ONLY DID IT GIVE ME BACK MY VOICE, BUT ART HAS GIVEN ME EVERYTHING I HAVE WANTED OR NEEDED SINCE.

HEY! YOU ARE REALLY GOOD!

COOL NECK SCARF!

AT 30, WHEN I WAS TEACHING DRAWING AT A COLLEGE IN UPSTATE NEW YORK, DAD CALLED ONE NIGHT FROM DETROIT. MOTHER WAS DYING, HE SAID. I SHOULD COME QUICKLY. ALONE IN THE CAR, I SCREAMED ALL THE WAY BACK TO MICHIGAN.

I WASN'T SCREAMING IN ANGER OR RAGE OR AT THE THOUGHT OF AN IMPENDING LOSS. I HAD LEARNED THAT SCREAMING THICKENS UP THE VOCAL CORDS. ALREADY THIS HAD GIVEN ME BACK SOMETHING OF A VOICE. SO, I TOOK EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO BE ALONE, TO SCREAM, OR SING OR TELL MYSELF STORIES AS LOUDLY AS I COULD.
She couldn't talk and neither could I. I had been screaming for so many hours that I, too, was voiceless.

Mother died that night.