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### **Blessed Are the Cracked**

This week I visited my son Greg, Sunday afternoon as always, Western State Hospital, where he has lived for most of the past two years. He is twenty-four. As always we're locked into the visitors' room, for my protection—some of Greg's peers throw chairs, or lunge at strangers. I hug him, sign in, and we begin our ritual. I bring his favorite foods—diet Coke, Twix bar, a pound of cut-up fruit. He talks through the food, shoveling it down. Next I brush his hair.

While I brush he talks, gradually moving from the litany of harm he plans for a cruel staff member to calm discussions regarding lunch, or derisive snorts at the bald head of an aide. On some rare bright days he describes the intricacies of the rerouting and re-soldering and rewiring of the guts of his computer, to accept some new software application he found on the Internet at home or invented himself.

I brush his hair for a long time. It is down to his waist, thick and bushy and full of life, and he slowly calms, settling into my rhythm. His hair is warm and reasonably clean, a rich chestnut brown, not in good condition these days. I brush slowly, scalp to split ends, loosening knots with my fingers. I brush that living hair for nearly an hour, until it's time to leave.

At the door, as staff unlocks and lets me out, he looks at me—autistic and psychotic—he looks at me with the ease of the non-autistic and the clarity of the sane, and tells me he loves me. His eyes briefly meet mine and they are as bright as the sun.

“I love you, Mom.” “I love you, Greg.” And there we are, God looking at God, as humans are meant to look at each other. It's my son's great gift to me, his brief autistic gaze, letting light into this locked place.

Blessed are the cracked, for they let in the light.