

Gabriele von Arnim

LIFE IS A TRANSIENT CONDITION

Rowohlt Buchverlag

240 pages / 23 March 2021

In this brilliantly written account, Gabriele von Arnim writes dramatically, intimately and laconically about living with and in her husband's condition, telling the story of a life ravaged, of dying and loneliness.

After her husband's two strokes, Gabriele von Arnim spent ten years living with him and his disability. It is not his brain's speech centre, but his articulation centre that has been affected. He can find the right words, but they sound like small exploding firecrackers. And then the sentences just hang in the air. In this literary text, the well-known journalist and author describes the fine line between caring and encroachment, affection and bossiness. When do attempts to help end in humiliating degradation? When does self-sacrifice become merciless? How do you balance out being in the disability as well as being in life? *Life is a Temporary State* is a passionate narrative, as cool as it is tender, of a beleaguered life.



“They really do exist, these seconds that change your entire life, that rob you of all certainty and leave you staring emptily into a future you don't understand. A stroke, ten days later, catapulted him out of everything he had lived so far. And she became the wife of the sick man.”

Gabriele von Arnim

Gabriele von Arnim was born in Hamburg in 1946. She studied, completed her doctorate and spent ten years working in New York as a freelance journalist. She writes reviews for newspapers and radio, presents readings, has published several books and lives in Berlin.

“The book is not only about her - after his death -, but it leads towards him. It is a startling, wise, a loving book.” *DIE ZEIT*

“Gabriele von Arnim also tells of these dark hours, now and then switching to the third person, as if she had to look at herself from a distance, check what "she" is doing, thinking, reading. Thus this profoundly literary text never comes under suspicion of being sentimental. Arnim's language is as precise as it is quiet, every word is carefully chosen - this book unfolds its particular power because something truly beautiful emerges from the horror.” *NZZ am Sonntag*

- Since publication on the *Spiegel bestseller list*!
- More than 20,000 copies sold!
- English sample translation available.

GABRIELE VON ARNIM

LIFE IS A TRANSIENT CONDITION

English sample translation by Marielle Sutherland

For him

"I have always been fascinated by the idea that the future is waiting for us. That it holds in store for us events, incidents, ways of dying we know nothing about, but are already there, just waiting in the wings."

*Anne Weber, Ancestors. Diary of a Journey Through Time
[Ahnen. Ein Zeitreisetagebuch]*

PROLOGUE

He knows everything, and he can formulate it all as splendidly as ever. Except hardly anyone can understand him. It is not the speech centre of his brain that has been affected, but its articulation centre. He is able to find the right words, but they sound like exploding firecrackers. And then the sentences are strewn everywhere, and you have to try and gather them up and decipher them so you can finally answer him. He so longingly waits for answers. He so much seeks, so much needs to be understood. After all, he is still a person. A person who can think quickly but cannot speak intelligibly, or walk, or read or write.

Trapped. Destroyed. Imprisoned.

For ten long years.

In his youth, he had been a top athlete and had once even beaten the six-time German hurdles champion, Martin Lauer. He loved recounting the tale. However, he said, grinning, in the middle of the story, he had to admit that Lauer had been running with his arm in a cast.

He was still very sporty when it happened. He was a passionate tennis player and cycled regularly. He had a need for movement. But since the first stroke – with a bleed on the brain –, he's been paralysed down one side, and he'll never be able to walk again. Since the second – a cerebral infarction –, he's been unable to speak in such a way that others can immediately decipher what he is trying to say. And he will never be able to do that again. He who was once such a brilliant speaker, both professionally and socially, is falling more and more silent. You need imagination, practice and empathy to piece his syllables together into words, to make out his sentences. You have to be like a mother with her gabbling toddler, patiently straining your ears to find some meaning in what is coming out of his mouth.

I understand everything, he often says, I'm not a moron, when he notices the hesitation on people's faces as they listen helplessly to his apparent gibbering.

He certainly is not a moron. His sacrilegious, quick intelligence is still there. But incarcerated in his body, because others can barely understand what he's saying, and he cannot bear hearing himself. It is not his voice speaking. The sonorous concert pitch I fell in love with back then, that deep, enticing timbre, raw and erotic, calling me every few hours from so many telephone boxes across the town in which we had got to know each other one evening over dinner. That voice I had followed from New York to Washington so I could take another, closer look at the man it belonged to.

Now it's a slightly breathless, croaking, retching voice, a hoarse rasping. The words must be wrung from a sluggish tongue, from a half-paralysed uvula. He hates his voice. Talking is torture for him.

And yet he always loved talking, anywhere and everywhere. Now he hurls every word in the air like a projectile, with all the bodily strength he has.

How can anyone bear to live like that? How can anyone bear such a life? Hearing everything, grasping everything, reflecting on everything, but almost completely devoid of anyone to talk to, sitting on the sidelines, not being part of anything, because hardly anyone has the patience or ability, the assiduousness, to understand what you are saying.

How congested you must feel if your head is stuffed full with everything that has come in from the outside, yet hardly anything can get out. A head that only ever consumes. Talking was his job. Speechlessness has been his curse since the strokes.

How do you feel if everything becomes too narrow, your body a prison you cannot escape, and when just about the only reason left for having thoughts is to amuse yourself? How can you bear it if everything that is alive inside you is only able to live inside your head? How can you bear this desolation? Repudiated by a life you are still in; simultaneously present and absent, because you are starting to die away while you are still in the middle of living.

Up until now, one of my archetypal images of loneliness has always been the man who talks to the flies in the novel "The Wapshot Scandal" by the American writer John Cheever. The man delivers dry cleaning for a living and lives alone, sad, forsaken. He is happy in the evenings when the flies come into his kitchen. He doesn't shoo them away, for he needs their company.

We are all alone, he says; you look good, flies.

And after giving them this compliment, he finishes his supper in silence.

Now, when I think of loneliness, I think of him. He had visitors. He had a devoted and good-humoured carer who understood him straight away. He had me. But he couldn't ever chat with friends again or communicate in public in any capacity. He couldn't tell jokes or take part in a discussion – and yet that's precisely what he had always lived on: talking, commenting,

argumentation. He couldn't even escape into physical exertion; he couldn't run in the park, chase down the ball on the tennis court, go out on his bike. He couldn't escape into a book. He couldn't read. He needed constant attention, care, therapies. He had to be washed and rubbed with ointment, dressed and undressed, placed in the wheelchair and entertained.

He was entirely at the mercy of others. He had no privacy anymore. But we all also live on what we keep to ourselves, in the space reserved exclusively for ourselves. Again and again, boundaries were crossed – by doctors, carers, therapists, by me. For ten years, I watched his despair, his increasing loneliness, the resignation.

Just look at me, he cried – he actually screamed it –, just look at me. This face, the voice, the body. That can't be me.

Some of his friends were in tears when they saw him, this other, this broken man, for the first time.

I was angry. How could they do this to him? Burden him with their tears?

Others preferred to spare themselves this and stayed away.

What must it be like to have a lively mind that is so walled in? Enclosed in the shell of your half-paralysed body. Even now, when I try to say how it was, how it might have been for him, I veer away, because the images torment me. Because something was happening here that shouldn't have been allowed to happen. I look out of the window for something to help me – perhaps I should take a little walk, go down the street, turn left, order a coffee at the baker's, take a seat and drink it. Read the paper at the little table. For ten years, he couldn't even entertain the idea. He couldn't get up to go to the bathroom; he couldn't leave his room, couldn't get a book off the shelf and read it, put a CD on and listen to it, peel an apple in the kitchen and cut it up, pour a glass of wine and drink it with the cheese sandwich he couldn't prepare. He couldn't get himself a jumper from the cupboard when he was cold, call a friend when he fancied a chat. He couldn't even write emails.

One hand was paralysed and, with every letter, the other shook and went into a tailspin like an aeroplane under fire. But as he could still think quickly, he couldn't bear writing slowly, taking almost a whole minute to press one letter on the keyboard.

What was he supposed to do with all of his thoughts? All they could do was fly around in his own head. What was he supposed to do with this feeling of helplessness? Where did he escape to?

A felled man. A bear without a wilderness.

Sometimes, I thought, he must be bursting with all the force accumulating inside him. With all that knowledge and wit, with all that rage and tenderness, he must be on the point of shattering like a glass in ice. With all that solitude when, once again, no one has understood him; with all that anguish at having to remain inside himself with so many thoughts. Or trying to spill them to me. He needed me desperately and drove me off; he loved me passionately and attacked me with ferocious rage.

Again and again – I am repeating myself, I know, but this is really insistent within me –, I ask myself, I try again to imagine how he might have felt inside. I believe it was Esther Kinsky who once said that when you're translating a text, you have to immerse yourself in it to the point of exhaustion, until you fall into a trance and are no longer within yourself but within the other.

I was cowardly, and I still am now. I don't go all the way to the end of the road; I run away from it, just as I have always run away from it, back to myself, back into my original state. I was able to speak, walk, read and write. What a mercy. And yet I almost fell to pieces as a result of what is commonly called fate. A word I never particularly liked. It seemed to me too charged, too dramatic, too deistic, too arbitrary. But suddenly there was a new ring to it, for mythic inescapability had become ordinary reality. Because the only way to face such a burden was with humility. And with imagination. Because all I could do was wrest from this great fate some slight room for manoeuvre.

What is fate? What is a self-determined life? someone once asked a wise guru. Stand on one leg, he replied, and then lift the other one up.

It was hard enough standing on one leg.

As he is dying, a handyman who had seen him frequently writes to me: I am sorry to hear about the death of your husband. We have to grant him this now.

CHAPTER 1

DEATH

He went

In the spring, of all seasons

For a Parisian, a New Yorker or a Londoner, writes Octavio Paz, death is "a word to avoid, because it scorches the lips". The Mexican, by contrast, he says, seeks death, "caresses, mocks, celebrates, sleeps with it". Death is his favourite plaything and his most faithful lover, and he can only surrender to it willingly.

What blissful enticement. A tender anticipation of death, a sensuous lover we greet joyfully, embrace greedily and welcome in casually, despite that sense of foreboding – or perhaps even because of it. Our withered, still sinful flesh resisting and desiring at the same time, rebelling and submitting, surrendering to the sinister whispering of the Grim Reaper, melting away. An intoxicated, enraptured passing away. Ecstasy in the final act. The little death in lovemaking; the big death in the final breath, another lustreless, lustful "take me", gasped feebly as we plummet, unbridled, from here to there. We might almost yearn for it, this, our body's final lover.

If you want to kill me, then kiss me, they say in Mexico. In this country, you quickly get used to living with death, with elegant skeletons, with white bones and skulls – the empty, cavernous eyes, the mouth a solid, bare set of teeth –, with clattering white thigh- and shinbones and delicate anklebones. You amble along the street and see a wooden skeleton relaxing on a balcony. In a book shop, a rattling structure hangs from the ceiling; from the murales, the wall paintings, bony hands beckon in pallid friendliness. Everywhere, a bewilderingly lascivious lifelessness prevails. The cult

of the dead and skinless skulls are omnipresent. You can buy these heads at any market. They're made of plaster or clay, and usually painted in garish colours. Sometimes they have rhinestones for eyes, twinkling in apparent amusement. Mexicans have both a mystical and sensuous relationship with death. They picnic and sing on the graves. They flirt with La Catrina, perhaps the most famous woman in the country – you come across her in the street, in the lobby of the hotel you're putting up in, or in the restaurant named after her, where she smiles down from the wall, bloodcurdlingly beautiful. There are posters, drawings and countless paintings of this Dame of the Dead, ogling us coquettishly, as if being dead was so much more amusing than this vapid life. Usually in billowing clothes, with frills on the bodice, the skirt colourfully embroidered, wearing flamboyant make-up and extravagant hats on her head, she stands in front of boutiques, advertising clothes and femininity, or sits with gaudy friends on a bench in the ice-cream shop. Sometimes she resides in small, colourful glass cases you can put on your shelf at home.

At first, you take photos of all of these things merely as curiosities. You smile as much in amusement as in incomprehension at this exoticism. Until you start to grasp that what you are seeing here also has something to do with you, with the inescapable proximity between the now and the then, between your own body – still bedecked with flesh, still pulsing with blood – and your future bones, gnawed smooth. You grin a little awkwardly, pinch your warm skin pleurably, run your hand in mild triumph along your bare arm, feeling its living texture – ha, I'm still alive.

When, one morning, at the house of a Mexican friend – I had just arrived there the previous evening –, I was following the aroma of freshly brewed coffee, I found her sitting in the kitchen on a patterned red sofa. In one hand she was holding the coffee mug, and in the other the feature pages of the newspaper. She had placed the economics section on the knee of the skeleton sitting next to her. I was alarmed. Her husband had died a few years before. My head was full of images of some research I had done at the Museum of Natural History in New York, where I was allowed to

peek into dozens of chests in the cold storage room. Inside, tens of thousands of worms were gnawing at the flesh of dead monkeys and jackals, exposing clean, white bones.

She no doubt saw and read my frightened face. Get yourself a coffee, she said: welcome to Mexico. The skeleton beside my friend was of course not made of gnawed bones; it had been carved from wood. But my imagination was also really shaken up by this because I had never dared – and still never dare – picture what he looks like now, down there, deep in that pit in his coffin, which has been rotting for a long time now. Sometimes I go to his grave and devotedly plant lavender, stock and rosemary so as not to have to think about what is probably happening under the soil. Down there, where the worms are feasting on his flesh.

Today is the fifth anniversary of his passing, and, almost exactly to the hour of his death, I fell into the arms of a man. I wanted skin, hands, warm vitality. I wanted passionate obliteration, energy, presence, desire. To reassure myself I was alive.

Yet again, I am writing a fantasy I am not living. But actually, it is finally time to do all the things that are perhaps not considered appropriate. Who knows how many years I have before I'm lying beside him and my body, too, is food for the worms and mulch for the finest-quality cemetery humus. (Incidentally, you'd better remove the mercury so as not to poison the soil.) Maybe I'll even live on as La Catrina and stand in a glass case on a counter somewhere.

No, I didn't fall into anyone's arms; I actually took a cup of tea into my room and fell into reminiscing. I couldn't go into his room. A young woman has been living there for a while now, and was doing vocal exercises early this morning, warbling away.

At the hour of his death, there was an enormous sense of calm here. Also within me. The day before, I'd done a radio programme. His palliative doctor – as she told me later – had stopped at the roadside to listen to me. She didn't believe I'd be able to talk so fluently. I did – and I'm not proud of it.

That morning, I had put on some music in his room. Cello suites by Bach. In the days and weeks before, he had only been able to bear clarity. And cheerfulness. All I was allowed to read to him was wry poetry by Joachim Ringelnatz. He resisted everything else, trapped, as he was, in a state of nervous, quivering confusion. Maybe Bach, too, would reach him in his morphine-induced sleep. I had made myself a cup of tea and sat down, exhausted, on his bed. He was sleeping. Breathing steadily. Silence between us, a gentle silence harbouring a surprising harmony, a state of unison between him and me. What had been lacking so often in life, we seemed to accomplish in death. I wouldn't mind if this went on a few days longer, I thought. We could take our leave of each other this way. I looked out into the blue-grey sky, the white clouds skimming across it, and drank – soothed by my fatigue – my hot tea with a deep sense of calm.

We had come to the end of the road. He would die. At home. Just as I'd promised him. The road had been long; the fight had been hard. Now, it was good. It was good that it would happen now. He couldn't, and didn't want to, go on living – he hadn't eaten or drunk anything for days, hadn't taken any medicine, and he'd slapped the spoon out of my hand every time I'd tried to feed him. I was prepared and ready – and aghast when it happened, when he took a very deep, very long, tremblingly defenceless breath and ... and now I too held my breath and listened, put my ear to his heart, searched for his pulse with my fingers. Called his name. Not now, not yet, please no, don't leave me alone now, stay a little longer. I talked to him as if he were a guest and I was asking him to have a nightcap with me before leaving and going home.

But he did go. In the spring, of all seasons. When everything is sprouting and pushing through, when the buds are bulging, when life is awakening. Is it easier to say goodbye in the autumn? When everything is withering, wilting and vanishing anyway. Death is indifferent to the season. It pounces when it is ready. It takes whomever it wants. Now it had taken him.

It was not the morphine he was sleeping in. It was death he was disappearing into. It had come in the moment of tender accord between us. He had waited for me so he could die with me at his side. To gift me the final proximity there would ever be between us again. How often, over the past few weeks, I had whispered to him that he did not have to go on living for me, that he needed to go his own way. Now he had done it. He went. I stayed. Staying was as inescapable as going.

I opened the window – the birds were singing, just as they sang today, too. They are celebrating life, I thought – and I lay on and beside him, on this body I had once loved, and which still seemed to be breathing in this world even as it passed over into the beyond. It was his body – still warm and soft, not yet nothing but corpse, still palpably him – in transition, departing, on his way home. How he had loved telling that joke:

A man goes into a bar where there's a birthday party going on. The guy's turning fifty, says the landlord, pouring the new guest a beer. He raises his glass, toasts the birthday boy and calls over: Heading home already, too?

After two strokes, a few bouts of pneumonia and several thromboses, after pulmonary embolisms, a tracheotomy, a week in a coma, a tracheostoma in his neck, a PEG tube in his stomach, a bedsore that went unnoticed for so long that it was almost right on the bone, almost causing a fatal sepsis; after a hospital bug that landed him in a foul-smelling rehab clinic, where he was even more isolated in his room, a room you could only enter with a gown, gloves, mask and cap, after nurses who didn't know how to handle a respirator, after doctors (there were also fantastic ones), who didn't read his files and gave him – a man whose life was already hanging by a thread – the wrong medicine, or the wrong treatment in the form of a radical evacuation for a gastro-intestinal endoscopy that wasn't even intended for him but for a patient in the room next door; after forty-seven days in intensive care, a good four months in the rehab clinic and nine-and-a-half years in nursing care at home, he sorrowfully headed home.

And I remained behind in tatters. Behind, we say, as if we've missed the departure. As if death is the destination and life is the waiting hall. Which is ultimately what it is. I remained behind as a wife without a husband, a carer without a patient, a widow without a job to do. How can you live without cares, pressure, fear, existential challenges? What is it like for someone who isn't needed any longer? A figure like a broken-up jigsaw puzzle; its individual parts need to be joined together. But how? What kind of image might emerge? So, who was I? In the past few years, and before that? Who was I before the illness? And during the illness? Who am I now, and who could I be in an indeterminate future?

As always in times of helplessness and perplexity, the first thing I do is sit still and stare blankly. Then read, write, work. Plant flowers or put them in vases, cycle, watch the leaves in the wind, wander with the clouds in the sky, do some aerobics (sometimes), rub my temples with aurum lavandula, wash my hair, put on some make-up, some lipstick – I don't want to look in the mirror and see a person who looks the way I feel –, eat chocolate (unfortunately), lean on the few close friends I have, buy candles to match the colour of the walls in the study, watch dogs at play, watch children with envy, for they can bawl at the world full-throated and without inhibition. Write my nightmares down.

This one, for instance:

I have to crawl through a pipe. Through many pipes. There is a loudspeaker announcement before each stage. The last one is a warning about something, but we – whoever the others are – keep on crawling. People in front of me, people behind me. No escape. Me in the pipe. Trembling in panic. But I keep on crawling. I have to do it. It is only when I awaken in the dream that the information, or the rumour, reaches me that when you think you've finally reached the light, the air at the end of the tunnel, and you're finally pushing yourself out of the pipe, your head will be chopped off.

Or this one:

A man dressed in black, with a black dog on a black lead, comes towards me, sets his dog on me; the dog bites me, bites into me so hard, into my hand or my leg, that I scream in pain, and right then, a tick flies into my open mouth. I know it will destroy me from the inside. The objective has been achieved, the purpose fulfilled. Man and dog leave off me and walk away.

You have to learn, says my doctor, to spit the ticks out.

Or this one:

Two very large, beefy dogs are lying on top of me and tearing each other to pieces. Seizing each other by the throat, snapping at each other's flanks. In only a matter of seconds, they will have bitten and torn not only each other but also myself to shreds.

I wake up screaming.

That's when you would definitely rather be awake. Waiting for the sunrise. And yet, when the sun comes up in that beautiful apricot or honey colour, it hurts so much that you'd rather send the day back into the night and wish for clouds and drizzling rain. Embed your own sadness in the tristesse of the weather. Ask all-important questions. What is life? What makes us human? I'm human too, but in what sense? And not come up with any answers. So instead ask smaller questions: should I cook tonight or go out to eat?

One day, a blackbird visits me. It perches for a long time on my balcony, contemplating something. Perhaps it's waiting for me to go so it can finally pluck at my plants and gather material for its nest. Whilst studying it, I ask myself if I feel superior to it. It being a bird; me being a human. And I can't think of any decent argument for this.

I am practising the present. And I'm thinking of that wonderful line by the writer Peter Kurzeck: "The present - it's not simply merely now." I am practising sitting on a chair in the sun, without a phone, without a newspaper, without a laptop – just with a cup of tea. I have time. And I've

forgotten what that is, having time. What an erroneous expression. As if you can have time, possess it. After all, all you can do is insert yourself into what we call time. And see what you can do with yourself within it. Do I want to fill it up quickly so I can drive the grief away? Or how can I endure it? Enduring time. I don't know anything. All I know is that I am at the end and a beginning. At the end of my strength and at the beginning of – well, what? What shall I do with this nervousness, this fear? Perhaps displace it into the world? Push it outside? It's true, there's plenty going on out there to unsettle me. But I'd have to crawl out of my cocoon. I can't. Not yet.

A friend who lost her husband sat for a year on the same chair by the same window and saw nothing outside.

When the phone rings, I always look first to see who it is. There are people who are so obviously making an effort to strike the "right", empathetic tone of grief that I don't want to deal with them. When I think about myself, I feel like a wanderer lost on a misty moor of emotions. For a long time, I've been telling myself it really is time to sit down and write, because then I might be able to begin to grasp some of what has happened these past ten years.

You can only defend yourself against life by writing, a friend once told me while he was still ill. I would really like to defend myself against life by living, I muttered in response. But think of David Grossman, who has written such a passionate and intimate book about death and grief, who has paced out the "land of damnation", explored the exile in which the bereaved unexpectedly find themselves again, far away from the lives of others. Because it is only when he writes, Grossman says, that he can hope to understand his life.

CHAPTER 2

HOW TO SAY IT

Dearest friend,

Say it, you said, when we saw each other last, a few weeks ago, while we were walking under the low-hanging cloud cushions by the Lietzensee lake. And since then, I've been asking myself what "it" is. And I've been terrified. There seems to be too much packed into this little word. Only two letters. Usually not even a centimetre wide, and weighing only a few grammes. I imagine a firework on New Year's Eve, with its glowing tip, shooting up into the air and trickling down to Earth in thousands of particles, like stardust. Except my "it" is not a spray of glitter. It's a cornucopia of sorrows and adversities. So where am I supposed to reach in and pull something out? Like with Secret Santa? And then unwrap the present?

"We tell ourselves stories in order to live", wrote Joan Didion in 1968 in the volume "The White Album", in which she established herself as a strong, individual voice within the countercultural chorus of American intellectuals. More than forty years later, the seventy-eight-year-old Didion tells stories in order to survive – or perhaps it is more accurate to say: to be able to bear survival. She lost her husband and her daughter in close succession. Now she writes against forgetting and against remembering, against death and against fear. She is ill, she is getting old, she is alone. She is becoming thinner and thinner, less and less, less and less certain. Honesty is all that remains. The unsparing acknowledgement of the affliction of life's transience. The writer Antje Rávic Strubel, who has translated and admired Joan Didion for years, once called her a "dissector of reality".

We tell ourselves stories in order to live. We need stories in order to understand life. And perhaps that's exactly what I need to tell you: a story.

Tell it, you said; tell how it was and what it did to you, both of you. Well, if I am to tell "it", I will also have to tell myself. Come clean, in complete discretion. Reveal myself. Because you want to know how to live through times of crisis, who we become, whom we discover within ourselves, from where we get the strength and patience we so badly need, and where we are lacking in something, where we fail, where we fracture, and where we need glue to join us back together. Which glue sticks best?

The crises have chased us down, like mosquitoes looking for blood. We've had to run away from death time and again. In such times, can one still find the tranquillity to recollect oneself, to pause for thought, to change? Or do we become stupefied? How do we exist in the shark jaws of life, ready to snap shut at any moment?

That's what I'm supposed to tell.

How do you deal with fear, that nasty companion? How do you balance out being within the illness and staying within life? How does life change when a maniac, who only ever wanted one thing – his independence –, suddenly becomes completely dependent? How narrow is the boundary between caring and encroachment? When does devotion become oppression? When does trying to help end up as humiliating denigration? When does sacrifice become merciless? How can you love and look after a man who breaks down on the day you tell him you cannot live with him anymore? What do you do when this senseless fate strikes the same two people twice? When she too becomes ill, and it becomes more and more difficult not to rail against this fate? How does your relationship change with other people? How do you learn not to be offended when some, who once called themselves friends, stay away because of fear of illness and weakness? How do you deal with the gaping chasm between reality and perception in a life such as this?