

*b*  
BRIO

AT THE  
EDGE  
OF  
THE  
SOLID  
WORLD

DANIEL DAVIS WOOD

These are the things I remember:

I stirred when a warmth and wetness touched my back. Snowflakes lashed the window only inches from my eyes. A flurry whipped through the dark in swirls of flickering white, then rushed at the glass with a gust and exploded and scattered over the ground. Behind me shallow breaths were teasing the hair on the nape of my neck. I propped myself up on an elbow and angled around to carefully, carefully draw back the covers. The glow of light on the snowdrifts outside cast a haze across the bed. My wife, I saw, slept deeply despite the damp that spread out around her. Her waters had broken and soaked through her nightclothes and now they'd flooded the sheets and the mattress.

I let out a sigh and let myself drop onto my pillow again. I lay there with the gale thrashing at my back as I watched the rise and fall, the gentle rise and fall, of my wife beside me breathing. The light traced an arc along the broad curve of her belly. It swelled with each breath she drew, relaxed with each exhalation. I lay there and I felt between us a momentary decoupling, the opening of a disjuncture in the life we shared. I wonder now how far I could've prolonged the feeling if I'd remained as I was, so still, and made no move to rouse her. Awake and alert in the present, I watched her sleep on and moment by moment withdraw from the flow of time. She couldn't see, as I could see, that the world she'd known when she'd closed her eyes was already gone, lost to us, and a new world had taken its place.

The wheels of the cases I'd filled with clothes stuck fast in the snow in the car park. Sliding doors swished open and released a burst

of heat. We faced the ghostly fluorescence of an emergency access corridor. A nurse hurried out towards us, bracing herself against the cold, and in words at the very limits of what I knew of her language she urged us to tell her quickly what had happened, what was wrong. My wife straggled forward through piles of powder. Her figure and gait announced much of what the nurse sought to know. The nurse reached out to take her hand, to guide her through the open doors. I battled luggage against stubborn mounds of snow and struggled not to slip on the underlying ice. I heard my wife adopt the nurse's native tongue to ask her if she might switch to the only language I speak. Then without waiting for an answer either way, my wife made the switch herself and spoke rapidly of what had happened. The broken waters, the snowstorm, the two hours' drive on slippery roads. The absence of any aches or pains and the unnerving lack of contractions.

The nurse led my wife down the corridor, one hand at her back, and together they turned a corner and abruptly vanished from view. I left the luggage by the doors and dashed back into the snow, to the car. From the boot I retrieved the capsule seat we thought we'd need for the journey home. Then I dragged our stuff inside and placed the capsule on top of the pile and set off to see where my wife had been taken. I gave her name to another nurse and was led to a spartan room. A small round table and two plastic chairs, a bed beside a tiny window. She sat calmly on a folded blanket, clad in a sky-blue hospital gown, while a new nurse knelt beside her and drew blood from the crook of her arm. Bag by bag, item by item, I hurried up and down a stairwell off the corridor and transferred our belongings to the corner of the room. I returned to my wife as the nurse extracted the needle with care and pressed a shred of cotton against the puncture. Urine samples were taken next and after that a midwife arrived to conduct the more urgent assessments. My wife lay on her back. I watched the calm disappear from her eyes. I watched her clench herself against the things she knew were coming. Feet into stirrups,

thighs apart, a gloved hand probing in ways that triggered at first a wince and then a hardening of the gaze.

The due date we'd been given was still two weeks away. Nearly four hours had elapsed since the waters had broken. So far, labour hadn't involved so much as a cramp or a twinge. Should any of this give us reason to worry? We asked the nurses, we asked the midwife, but just as a doctor entered the room to discuss our plans for the birth my wife buckled over, crashed to her knees, struck by the violence of a contraction as if belted with a weapon. Something fierce inside her seized her, wrenched her innards and bent her double, dragging a groan through her throat. She was panting for breath, almost gasping, by the time I'd managed to hoist her up again. The doctor vied for her attention and put his face in front of hers, nearly nose to nose, and when he was certain she'd focused on him he gave her a knowing smile. He muttered something I took to be a dismissal of our concerns. My wife understood what he meant but clearly didn't like his tone. She swung around to find me beside her, agony radiant in her eyes, and just as she seemed about to speak she lurched away and shot out an arm to hold herself against whatever she could reach. A hand hooked onto the edge of the table, fingers scrambled for purchase on one of the plastic chairs, and in this awkward position, clutching at the furniture around her, my wife kept herself upright but hunched as she quivered with spasms of pain.

Offer comfort to the wounded. Alleviate their suffering. Do whatever it takes to bring them the peace they crave. That's the inherent tendency, that's the animal instinct. I felt it flare in the core of myself and burn through the whole of my body. I felt it sear my bloodstream with its command to help, to *act*. The doctor dematerialised. The nurses dissolved into air. I stepped towards my wife and took her in my arms. She made no shift in her posture to register my touch. Softly I cupped my hands over hers. I leant in to place a kiss on her forehead. I could taste the sweat that slicked her brow and I felt with my lips the heat of her skin and the strands of hair that stuck

to it. I broke away slowly, kept my eyes on hers, but then from over my shoulder I heard the calm voice of the doctor. He stood behind me and snatched my wife's attention with commentary too articulate for me to comprehend. As she mulled over his words I stole a moment to step aside, towards the window, and tap out a message on my phone. We'd agreed that I should alert our families as soon as the contractions hit. An absence of thirty seconds. Three short words, an exclamation point. I pressed a button to send the update and just like that, even before I'd slipped the phone back into my pocket, my brief account of events unfolding right then inside a hospital room in the snowbound heart of the Alps had blitzed across the planet to land in the hands of my parents and hers, with dings and chimes and flashes of light, at dusk on a bright summer's day in Australia. A wounded glare assailed me when I turned back to my wife. Betrayal, resentment, disdain. A squint through slit eyes, a motion of the jaw as of grinding teeth. Her expression froze me where I stood.

I opened my mouth to speak but before I could make a sound another contraction brought her low. She staggered forward, reached for me, interlocked her fingers with mine and with her other hand she grappled for my shoulder. She crunched my knuckles and clawed at my back. Her entire body convulsed, snapped like a lash, then she went limp and faltered at the waist. She fell forward, onto me, before she dropped and slumped into a cower. With her fingers splayed on the floor she rocked on the balls of her feet. I knelt down beside her and tried to command her attention. She looked at me but didn't see me. Tears welled in her eyes, a flush blazed up from her cheeks to her temples. She held me with an empty stare and suddenly I understood her anger of a moment ago. She'd been taken hostage by reflexes at odds with her thoughts. All her wants and inclinations, all the birthing arrangements we'd made, all of those had been suppressed by the screech of synaptic mayhem. When she watched me step aside, she saw me flaunting the freedom she'd lost. I wasn't just sending a message home in accordance with our plans. I was breaking out of the

fog that had encompassed her, the fog that shrank her world around her immediate bodily needs.

So of course she glared at me. A curl of the lip, mottled cheeks. Betrayal, resentment, disdain. Then her body claimed control once again and a cloud occluded her eyes. She fell away from me, fell back into herself, and I found then, as I find now, that I know no words to convey the sense of impotence that overcame me. I'm not sure that this or any other language can capture it. To see that pain latch onto her. To watch it immobilise and debilitate her. To feel capable of nothing more than standing as a spectator to her trauma. To hold back, unmoving, as the nurses and the doctor intervened where I couldn't. I stood there at the darkened window, I looked out at the world beneath a mantle of snow, I tried to keep my distance while the experts gave my wife more help than I was able to offer. What was the worth of my being there at all? Why not flay the skin from my body, let my veins run dry and wither, strip away all the sinews and flense the flesh from my bones? All I was was a pair of eyes staring out at my wife from the aether. Never before had I felt so totally distinct from her, situated at such a remove, even as every atom in me thrummed with empathy tuned to a pitch that made me want to scream. But the other bodies in that room rushed to do their work, bringing themselves between us to give her the relief she craved, and with their purpose and expertise they left me to my inertia. Absolutely still, but absolutely attentive, I watched them and I resolved that if all I could do was stand and stare then I would at least bear witness to every detail of every event opening up before me. Be wholly attuned to the moment. Let nothing occur without notice. Observe, catalogue, and testify. Iterate.

Hours passed in chaos. Half the day was chaos. One nurse flicked on a computer screen and bathed the room in sickly light. Another connected my wife to a snarl of cords and wires, plastering her with electrode pads and abdominal transducers. Digital graphs leapt to life, testing the baseline heart rate of our unborn child and tracking the oxygen levels in utero. Other nurses came and went,

brought things for comfort and took things away. Cold compresses, warm compresses. Balms and ointments, sedatives, salves. Minimal food, regular drinks. Boiled sweets and herbal teas. I tried to ignore the periodical rattling of my phone, the buzzing of my parents and in-laws begging for an update. I wouldn't vacate the scene again, not even momentarily. I would stay present; I would remember. I stood back and watched. Staff rotated as some took respite and others ended their shifts. They rearranged the furniture so my wife could pace the room. They made and remade the bed and kept the lights on low. When daybreak came the darkness beyond the window disappeared. The sun rose over the peaks of the mountains. It lit up the snow on the streets outside, dazzled the soft new surface of the world. Someone drew the curtains to take the edge off the brightness. The curtains trapped the heat that crept in through vents in the floor. Stickiness pooled in my armpits and groin and I felt the first dull thud of a migraine pounding into my skull.

Whenever my wife lay down she'd seize my hands with terrifying strength, crisscrossing my skin with bright red marks where she dug in her nails. When she tottered to her feet she'd hobble halfway to the window and stand and sway from side to side, eyes turned up to the ceiling, murmuring like a shaman in communion with another realm. Then she'd contort and arch her spine, she'd stoop and haul herself back to the bed, and with strands of soggy hair spread across the pillow she'd cast about for me again and reach out once more to grip my hands and the whole routine would repeat. Despite this the doctor insisted that there was as yet no medical need for interventions. Our child's arrival was imminent, he said, so we could and should persist with our plans for a natural delivery. But really these moments of incident, of motion and discussion, rocked us in surges, in waves, intermittently. Most of our time in that room was thickened by indistinct swathes of silence, of regulated breathing and controlled recuperation, punctuated by the sporadic violence of a body against itself.

Eventually the contractions became more than could be withstood. Their duration didn't decrease, their frequency didn't rise. Their intensity did not wane in the least. If anything, they gathered strength. My wife stopped moaning and started howling and then she turned to pleading for mercy. She begged for someone to simply lay hands on the life inside her and wrest it out. She wept and choked on her tears, and cursed into the surrounding air, until her eyes dilated and her eyelids fluttered and she gave herself up to fatigue. Exhaustion swept over her body like a sudden onrush of wind. It washed the colour from her face and dragged her into a sleep so intense that even successive contractions couldn't wake her. I sat beside her, stunned, and watched her torso shudder each time her muscles cramped and relaxed. The skin on her swollen stomach drew taut and slackened, drew taut and slackened, with the rhythm of waves smashing over the sand before being sucked back to sea. I felt the ache in my head build into an attack on my vision, and so, to regain my own composure, I sat and watched over my wife in her state of uncanny calm. She slept through the mayhem around her and she slept through the tumult inside.

A second doctor entered the room to confer briefly with his colleague. Together they announced their intention to induce the birth. I missed their meaning the first time they spoke but the new doctor translated for me. The other doctor woke my wife, a series of forceful taps on the wrist, and when she came around he began to explain the situation. Eighteen hours had passed since the waters had broken; further delay increased the risk of bacterial infection and recent changes inside the womb had given the specialists cause for concern. The new doctor reached for the bedside screen and angled it so my wife and I could see. He pointed to a horizontal line. It oscillated with peaks and troughs at regular, reliable intervals. That, he said, was our child's baseline heart rate. Next he pointed to a darker line that ran parallel to the first until its tail end ticked up and swerved suddenly down. That was the current heart rate, he said, and, as we



could see, it had become volatile, slowing and speeding and slowing again. Its pattern gave shape to a cycle of protracted, heightened stress followed by drastic enervation. That cycle had to be broken, right now, to avoid the very worst, to not jeopardise the birth.

Induction required an epidural that had been arranged before anyone told us. The doctors hadn't even finished speaking when two technicians wheeled into the room a monster of a machine, a slap-dash hulk of tubes and coils, valves and bellows, electronic keypads and needles as long as fingers. One technician helped my wife roll onto her side. The other worked with the first doctor to ready the anaesthetics. The new doctor hurried me towards the bed to make way for the equipment. The sudden movement stoked the pain in my head and I felt as if my brain might blow apart. I winced, I'm sure, as I knelt beside my wife and laid a hand on her cheek. She locked her eyes onto mine and did not let them break away.

Now I could see the first technician standing directly behind her. I watched him hold her steady with one hand on her shoulder. With his other hand he prodded different places along her spine. When he found the optimal spot his colleague approached my wife with a needle. I watched the needle vanish behind her and I watched for her reaction. I watched a grimace twist her face into a knot of creases and furrows, I watched her draw in her elbows and knees, I watched her hold on to the torsion while she waited for the sting in her back to fade away. Nobody could later explain to us why it didn't, why nothing changed. The contractions wouldn't ease. They came and went, and came and went, each one striking with all the force of the one before it. Nobody could tell us, either, why the induction hadn't worked. The child still wouldn't arrive. The interventions appeared to bring the birth no closer. We'd hoped they might hasten the moment in which we'd at last become the parents we longed to be. Instead we returned to the process. Recumbent on the bed. Regulated breathing and controlled recuperation. Standing up when contractions hit and bearing down on command. We returned to the

haze of having no idea of what was coming next, or when.

Just after midday the child's heart went haywire. Erratic scrawls devoured the screen of the electrocardiograph. The triple digits above the graph plunged and seemed bound for zero. The shrieking of the machines sent shards of pain through my head. One of the doctors ordered an emergency caesarean and left the room to prepare for surgery. His colleague remained behind to oversee one last attempt at a natural delivery. Nurses wheedled my wife into returning to the bed. I stood above and behind her while she reached up and held my hands. The doctor knelt at her feet. I could see his face, masked, between my wife's raised knees. As he started to speak to her, with unimpeachable seriousness but in words that meant nothing to me, I looked away from him and looked down at my wife and tried to lock eyes again. This time, though, she did not reciprocate. She looked up into the air, at nothing, but less with a glaze or an emptiness than with the appearance of someone transfixed before a mirror. She seemed as if she was somehow contemplating her own reflection, meeting herself in vacant space and scrutinising her own mien to sound out the depths of her resilience. Then I watched her haul her resilience to the surface. Her entire being swelled with new breath, the rush of blood, the force of energy summoned up and focused on a single act. I could see her marshalling all the dynamism she had left to work with, gathering every last trace of her strength and channelling it into one final push at giving life to the child inside her. The doctor stammered out words that seemed no longer to issue instructions on what my wife should do, that seemed instead to offer spontaneous, almost panicked responses to what she was already doing. She arched her back, she pushed, she screamed. The doctor's voice grew urgent, excited. My wife tore into the veins in my wrists, kicked free of the doctor's hold on her ankles, and then she released the first real words she'd managed to utter in hours as she wailed that she could feel it, she could *feel* it coming out.

This is how it came at last. The second doctor returned to the

room in the company of a third. The new arrival swanned around with an air of seniority, a multinational CEO summoned from his private yacht, and instantly both of his colleagues were deferential towards him. He consulted with them, then gave them instructions, then spoke calmly to my wife as she writhed on the bed beneath him. When he stopped speaking he shot me a glance that asked without words if I concurred with what he'd said. He'd spoken to my wife as a formality, knowing she couldn't really follow what he put to her, and he'd assumed I'd heard and understood so that I could speak on her behalf to give consent to his plans. I wavered. I probably nodded. My vision swam and thunder resounded through my head. I didn't speak out, I'm sure of that, and the doctor saw my silence as tacit accord. He turned to one side and pulled towards himself a tray of specialist instruments that someone had stationed nearby. Probes and clamps and scalpels. Nurses had gathered around my wife. One of them held a damp cloth to her forehead. Another tried to soothe her as she sobbed and groaned. Then the other two doctors returned to their superior and the three of them huddled together at the foot of the bed. The lead doctor snapped on a latex glove and plucked something sharp off the tray. I saw a flash of silver and in one swift movement the doctor touched the blade to my wife and cut. She convulsed with a flex and a flump, as if she'd just sustained a bolt of electricity, and as soon as a scream poured out of her I saw blood spill between her legs and trickle over the doctor's gloves. The other two doctors bent in to staunch the flow. One of them held two haemostats, the other a needle and thread. When the lead doctor rose to his feet and took a step back from the bed, I saw that in his arms he was cradling an infant. The child lay unmoving with its head reclined in the palm of his hand. It seemed shrunken, even shrivelled, with a mop of black hair and skin of spectral blue beneath smears of blood and mucus. In my mind I heard a false echo of the bawling I'd expected. I searched its face for signs of life but it kept its eyes closed tight and made no sound at all.

I realised then that my wife had fallen silent as well. She'd stopped screaming and now she seemed to be holding her breath as she focused intensely on the child. With no apparent thought of what she was actually doing, she began to unbutton the hospital gown she'd been wearing throughout the delivery. The doctor approached us and quickly showed me the child's sex, and then he laid her, skin to skin, tummy down, upon my wife's chest. The girl was still blue, still bloodied, still motionless and silent, but none of that seemed to trouble the doctor and none of it troubled my wife. Words elude me when I think of how best to name the look that washed over my wife's face as she tilted her head to one side and peered down at the child. Ecstasy comes to mind, but it also cheapens what took hold of her. She appeared to possess no awareness of the world outside her field of vision, no concern for any of its trivial phenomena. She struck me as having been overcome by something primal, something animal, something that lacks a term of its own because it is prior to all language. She was burning, resplendent with adoration, and the instant love she felt for our daughter seemed to throb out from her beating heart and through her skin and upwards into the girl.

The pallor of the child warmed into a ruddy red and I noticed, then, that she too lay there drawing shallow but steady breaths. Muscle by muscle, limb by limb, motion worked its way into her body. One tiny foot curled its toes. An open hand scrunched into a fist. Eyelids strained and then shot open, and as the blinding light of the room inundated her vision my daughter forced her lips to part and let out a feeble cry. It's easy to look back on that moment and say, very simply, that what I felt then was something I'd never felt before. It's more truthful, though, to look back and say that what I felt wasn't a feeling at all in the usual sense of the word. It wasn't like bliss or despair, it wasn't like fear or contentment. It didn't pierce my heart, it didn't quicken my pulse. I didn't feel it *inside*. I felt it on the outside, I felt it on my skin. It came over me like a fire, a crackling blaze rushing fast across the surface of my body. It came as a scorching

awareness of the outer limits of my being, of all the places where I as a living creature met the enveloping space of the world. It was a shock of radical selfhood, as if all the emotions I'd expended over so many hours in that stifling, sweat-soaked room had receded from its furthest reaches to lodge again in the flesh and blood that were mine alone. It brought with it an air of calm, a calm that broke distinctly with the chaos of the preceding hours, a calm that began to wear away the worst of the pain in my head, and the force of that pain diminished further still when my wife turned to me, turned her eyes upwards to find mine again, and spoke to me, in a shattered voice, of the life we had created.

She's so beautiful, she said.

Yes, I agreed. She is.

Beautiful, in that moment, changed its definition. It had something to do with her helplessness, her vulnerability, her sudden exposure to forces she had no concept of. Drying bodily fluids matted her hair to her scalp. White, chalky vernix speckled her skin, clumps of it in her armpits and in the folds of her neck. The fat wet tube of the umbilical cord hung limp and translucent from her stomach. A nurse in scrubs came up to me and handed me a pair of scissors. She took the cord in her fist and with a nod invited me to cut. Black sludge oozed over the blades. The nurse clamped off the stub of the cord, tied a knot and tossed the remnants into a bin for biomedical waste. Minutes later the placenta slopped onto the floor. My wife felt nothing when it came. I managed to catch a glimpse of it, a glistening mound of clotted blood with veins all through it like the roots of a tree in soil. Quickly, though, the nurse heaved it into the bin and wheeled the bin out of the room while another nurse entered with a mop and dolloped soapsuds on the floor.

Eventually a new nurse arrived to help my wife start breastfeeding. With nimble fingers she stroked a nipple to coax out the colostrum, but at first nothing would flow. Then she began to massage the breast, putting pressure on the milk glands. Our daughter moaned,

kept her eyes closed, and guided by scent alone she switched her nose back and forth and cast about for nourishment. When she couldn't latch on she thrashed in frustration, swinging her heavy head this way and that, until at last a slick of something emerged and she leapt at it, licked it, gained traction on the nipple, and finally nuzzled her face against the breast and drank. She worked hard to gulp down the milk, biting my wife with her empty gums, but there wasn't enough milk and soon it ran dry. Then she threw back her head and yowled, refused to be calmed, wouldn't suffer being rocked or swaddled. When I picked her up and paced the room, she kicked and cried in protest. When I passed her back to my wife, she raised her pitch and squalled. Finally she ran out of breath and just collapsed, defeated. Her head dropped onto my wife's shoulder and instantly the girl fell asleep. My wife and I exchanged panicked glances, startled by the sudden silence.

The nurse told us both not to worry. In her halting pidgin she added that this sort of thing happened often. Now was a good time for a health check, she said, and a chance to get our daughter dressed before we tried to feed her again. She took the girl in her hands and asked me to follow her out of the room. The two of us left my wife behind in bed. We moved down the corridor and entered a dark annex where the nurse laid the girl on a changing mat. She measured her and weighed her and took her picture for the hospital records. With a brush she dabbed ink from a pot onto the pristine sole of my daughter's foot, then she pressed the foot to a piece of card to leave a print. She wrapped a nappy around the girl, fastened it in place, and pulled open the doors of a cabinet to pass me a handful of tiny clothes. She said she wanted to tend to my wife a little more, to take a look at her stitches and make sure the pain was abating, and with that she abruptly excused herself and left the room.

I wrangled my daughter's arms and legs into a jumpsuit far too big, stunned by the lack of resistance from a child so exhausted she didn't wake when I rolled her side to side. I savoured the swish of

my fingers against her dusky skin, and the sweetness of her smell as the vernix dried and flaked. Finally, alone for the first time since the onset of labour, I took my phone from my pocket and snapped a photograph of her face. Eyes closed, entirely at peace, her manifest perfection bore no trace of the torment of her arrival. With the press of a button I cast her picture into the wake of my initial message. Hours beforehand her grandparents had been alerted to her impending arrival. Now in only a second, halfway around the world and more than a full day's travel from our door, they'd be able to see the face of the granddaughter whose presence they had yet to know.

Then the nurse returned to me. My wife, she said, was being transferred to a recovery room. She retrieved for me a bassinet with transparent plastic sides and fixed it to the frame of a trolley that came almost to waist height. I laid my daughter inside and wheeled her down the corridor, then with the help of the nurse I found my wife in a new bed and parked the trolley beside her pillow. The frame held the bassinet at the level of her eyes. My wife was able to lay on her side with our daughter stationed next to her. She could watch the girl through the plastic without having to shift position. While I waited for the nurse to leave, I sent another message to our families in Australia. For them a new day would have dawned and I knew they'd now be expecting a call, but I told them we had no headspace for coherent conversation and I promised we'd speak with them after we'd had a chance to get some rest. When the nurse left the room at last, when she left the two of us, weary, alone with our newborn daughter, I felt free to lay down as well. I found a little clearing on the mattress and wrapped my arms around my wife. She seemed to have been mostly relieved of her pain and I'd been relieved, too, of the pressure in my skull. From behind her I held her close to me. I felt her move against me with each breath she drew and released.

She coasted into sleep almost as soon as our bodies touched. I could feel my own eyelids aching to close, to push away the world outside myself, and so with the day's last flickers of lucid thought I

reached out once more, over my wife, to touch our sleeping child. I swept my palm softly over her scalp and laid a gentle hand upon her cheek. Before sleep overtook me, I remember, I stole one final look at her, at her entire person. She slept in a thicket of winter clothes. She was a picture of absolute calm. Despite her stillness and the faded bedsheets and the dim light of the hospital room, when I looked at her then I saw a figure like the star at the heart of a spiralling galaxy, a gathering point of pure potential encircled by a halo of countless possible futures. I looked at her and saw horizons without limit. I felt as if, in time, nothing would be beyond her. I felt hope for her, for the person she was destined to become, for every person she might yet be capable of becoming.

Acting on some instinct I could only guess at, the girl reached up with her tiny hand and took the tip of my index finger. She curled her own fingers around my knuckle and nail, and I let her hold me like that as I drifted into darkness. I surrendered to my fatigue at last, overwhelmed by a deep and powerful gratitude. Gratitude. It came, I knew, from the simple fact that the girl had fought her way into existence. I was grateful for her having made it just to this point in her life, and for my having been there to witness her first precious hours. I was grateful for the relief of the doubts I'd harboured for months, a relief she afforded me solely by being there and lying there with me. I was grateful for the knowledge, or really the reassurance, that on this occasion my wife and I had succeeded where only recently we'd failed.



## *An extraordinary novel about the limits of grief*

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**Daniel Davis Wood** is an Australian writer now based in Scotland. He is the author of *Blood and Bone*, which won the 2014 Seizure Viva La Novella Prize, as well as numerous essays on literature and literary culture.



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