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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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W;t

A Play by

Margaret Edson

Anyway.

All right. Significant contribution to knowledge.
Eight cycles of chemotherapy. Give me the full
dose, the full dose every time.

(In a burst of activity, the hospital scene is created.)

VIVIAN: The attention was flattering. For the first five minutes. Now I know how poems feel.

(SUSIE MONAHAN, VIVIAN's primary nurse, gives VIVIAN her chart, then puts her in a wheelchair and takes her to her first appointment: chest x-ray. This and all other diagnostic tests are suggested by light and sound.)

TECHNICIAN 1: Name.

VIVIAN: My name? Vivian Bearing.

TECHNICIAN 1: Huh?

VIVIAN: Bearing. B-E-A-R-I-N-G. Vivian. V-I-V-I-A-N.

TECHNICIAN 1: Doctor.

VIVIAN: Yes, I have a Ph.D.

TECHNICIAN 1: *Your* doctor.

VIVIAN: Oh. Dr. Harvey Kelekian.

(TECHNICIAN 1 *positions her so that she is leaning forward and embracing the metal plate, then steps offstage.*)

VIVIAN: *I am a doctor of philosophy—*

TECHNICIAN 1: (*From offstage*) Take a deep breath, and hold it. (*Pause, with light and sound*) Okay.

VIVIAN: —a scholar of seventeenth-century poetry.

TECHNICIAN 1: (*From offstage*) Turn sideways, arms behind your head, and hold it. (*Pause*) Okay.

VIVIAN: I have made an immeasurable contribution to the discipline of English literature. (TECHNICIAN 1 *returns and puts her in the wheelchair.*) I am, in short, a force.

(TECHNICIAN 1 *rolls her to upper GI series, where TECHNICIAN 2 picks up.*)

TECHNICIAN 2: Name.

VIVIAN: Lucy, Countess of Bedford.

TECHNICIAN 2: (*Checking a printout*) I don't see it here.

VIVIAN: My name is Vivian Bearing. B-E-A-R-I-N-G. Dr. Kelekian is my doctor.

TECHNICIAN 2: Okay. Lie down. (TECHNICIAN 2 *positions her on a stretcher and leaves. Light and sound suggest the filming.*)

VIVIAN: After an outstanding undergraduate career, I studied with Professor E. M. Ashford for three years, during which time I learned by instruction and example what it means to be a scholar of distinction.

As her research fellow, my principal task was the alphabetizing of index cards for Ashford's monumental critical edition of Donne's *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*.

(During the procedure, another TECHNICIAN takes the wheelchair away.)

I am thanked in the preface: "Miss Vivian Bearing for her able assistance."

My dissertation, "Ejaculations in Seventeenth-Century Manuscript and Printed Editions of the Holy Sonnets: A Comparison," was revised for publication in the *Journal of English Texts*, a very prestigious venue for a first appearance.

TECHNICIAN 2: Where's your wheelchair?

VIVIAN: I do not know. I was busy just now.

TECHNICIAN 2: Well, how are you going to get out of here?

VIVIAN: Well, I do not know. Perhaps you would like me to stay.

TECHNICIAN 2: I guess I got to go find you a chair.

VIVIAN: (*Sarcastically*) Don't inconvenience yourself on my behalf. (TECHNICIAN 2 *leaves to get a wheelchair.*)

My second article, a classic explication of Donne's sonnet "Death be not proud," was published in *Critical Discourse*.

The success of the essay prompted the University Press to solicit a volume on the twelve Holy Sonnets in the 1633 edition, which I produced in the remarkably short span of three years. My book, entitled *Made Cunningly*, remains an immense success, in paper as well as cloth.

In it, I devote one chapter to a thorough examination of each sonnet, discussing every word in extensive detail.

(TECHNICIAN 2 *returns with a wheelchair.*)

TECHNICIAN 2: Here.

VIVIAN: I summarize previous critical interpretations of the text and offer my own analysis. It is exhaustive.

(TECHNICIAN 2 *deposits her at CT scan.*)

Bearing. B-E-A-R-I-N-G. Kelekian.

(TECHNICIAN 3 *has VIVIAN lie down on a metal stretcher. Light and sound suggest the procedure.*)

TECHNICIAN 3: Here. Hold still.

VIVIAN: For how long?

TECHNICIAN 3: Just a little while. (TECHNICIAN 3 leaves.
Silence)

VIVIAN: The scholarly study of poetic texts requires a capacity for scrupulously detailed examination, particularly the poetry of John Donne.

The salient characteristic of the poems is wit: "Itchy outbreaks of far-fetched wit," as Donne himself said.

To the common reader—that is to say, the undergraduate with a B-plus or better average—wit provides an invaluable exercise for sharpening the mental faculties, for stimulating the flash of comprehension that can only follow hours of exacting and seemingly pointless scrutiny.

(TECHNICIAN 3 puts VIVIAN back in the wheelchair and wheels her toward the unit. Partway, TECHNICIAN 3 gives the chair a shove and SUSIE MONAHAN, VIVIAN's primary nurse, takes over. SUSIE rolls VIVIAN to the exam room.)

To the scholar, to the mind comprehensively trained in the subtleties of seventeenth-century vocabulary, versification, and theological, historical, geographical, political, and mythological allusions, Donne's wit is . . . a way to see how good you really are.

After twenty years, I can say with confidence, no one is quite as good as I.

(By now, SUSIE has helped VIVIAN sit on the exam table. DR. JASON POSNER, clinical fellow, stands in the doorway.)

JASON: Ah, Susie?