

ANNIE BOUTELLE

The Poet Laureate's Cold Medicine

For most of his career it worked, whisking him to a place he could not normally enter, where he could be more daring, undaunted by prep-school chums or aunts in Brighton, and each time he felt liberated into someone more poetic, the slight buzz behind his ears or in his temple telling him he was master here, he could line the words up, they'd scuttle to attention, it was almost like being prime minister or general, and no matter how steep the steps into the sullen dark, he could run down them with ease, the tap of his slippered feet sounding out the beat, and run back up them when he saw the end of the poem hovering there on the landing, and all was well in England as long as he had time to sleep it off before the lunch with Prince Charles, and he even boasted about it, in an offhand kind of way, how grateful he was to the syrup, he took one spoon only, unless it was an extremely taxing poem, and while he could grasp all those poems' endings, no matter how slippery, and hold tight, he didn't foresee how the process would sicken and die, due to the sudden absence of pseudoephedrine, and he began to realize just what a fix is, and what a fix he was in, standing there, barefoot, those slick erratic steps calling out his name like the witches beckoning Macbeth, and nothing but darkness in sight.