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For John Clellon Holmes

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For John Clellon Holmes

Shirley sent this photograph of John
Before the surgeons took his lower jaw
With strategies to put a new one in.
Their lovely plan was pluck out cancer's claw,
Be sure they got it all. They never did.
Next came his tongue, the cancer going on
Into an artery until he died.

Both hands hold tightly to the other one,
Thick hedge behind.

Wearing a pale blue robe
With darker piping, he's outside in the sun,
And after all these years I can't describe
His eyes on Shirley.

White T-shirt beneath,
Hair combed and shining, he is in some pain.
A Bloody Mary's on the table cloth.