

Hospice at Home

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Mother and sister flank the hospital bed
that has usurped this quiet living room.
Their smiles are starched with deep relief
at the soft hues of a comfortable home:
the thickly-piled oriental under foot,
the still reservoir outside the window,
the pinging grandfather clock in the hall,
that announces every quarter hour.

This somber picture is a drastic change
from the hospital room preceding it,
with the acrid tang in the heavy air,
the piercing alarm of the empty I.V.,
the throaty moans from the other bed,
and the battles with weary nurses
whose empathy had worn sliver thin
in the face of so much frailty.

The brother, one would expect, should look
the most relieved now that hospital hands
have been replaced with familial touches,
the mother's daily kneading of lotion into
the hardened cracks on his bed-bound feet.
But he sits stonily, resisting their eyes
and staring with inscrutable expression
at a distant point off in space.

His life had been a series of skirmishes
with parents, bosses, police and self.
The oldest of twelve, he alone had thought
he was his parents' most precious one.
The weight on his shoulders grew with time,
though he tried to flick it off at every turn.
Disappointment brewed unhappiness in him
and a caustic wit that always stung.

But in this sacred space, his fight is gone.
Instead, this no-longer estranged son has
told his family how much he loves them
and asked forgiveness for harms he has done.
Now, with the clock winding down, he waits
for the tumor to run its malignant course
and keeps watch with hope and dread
as eternity steadily advances.