

Poems for Sixfold, January 2019

Only in Las Vegas

“Help the homeless,”
reads the sign in block
letters as bold and black
as the frock worn by the
old priest who holds it.
Behind him the golden
glitter of the Mirage Hotel
shimmers in the brilliance
of the morning sun rising
over the eastern mountains.

Not more than five feet
away, a young
woman in a faded pink
jacket thrusts pictures of exotic
dancers into the curious
hands of the passers-by.

The Coming of Winter

It begins
with the falling of leaves,
dry leaves, dying leaves,
cascading madly to earth,
swirling in a
kaleidoscope of red and orange
against a backdrop of gray,
painting the ruins
of a farmer's fields,
exploding like a supernova,
caught in the frenzy
of the north wind rising,
ravaging the furrows,
stripping away the harvest
until only the skeletons remain.

Trace

Trace the pattern
of the drops
as the cold rain raps
on a window that
is full of night.

Flinch.
Recoil like a
child still scared of
monsters under the bed
or an old dog
broken by abuse or apathy.

The beating of the rain
is both rhythmic and
relentless, pacing the
torrid spurts of blood
through constricted arteries.

The water trickles
downward on the glass
tracing the outline of a
face with hollow eyes
and open mouth.

Then the water turns and
drains, dripping into sodden
muddy earth, leaving
nothing behind on the glass
but the emptiness.

This night, cruel as a
voodoo curse, will be long.
This night will be drawn out
like the blade of a sword.
This night will be eternal.

Terminal Wean

The group gathers just after
breakfast – three daughters
and their black sheep brother
in from California. Grandchildren
begin to leak out into the hallway.
All young adults now, they wait
their turn to make peace, to
say a tearful good-bye.

The decision to remove the life
support had not been easy to make –
feelings ran deep, too many sleepless
nights, too many angry words.
But the weak heart, the bloated lungs,
the massive stroke had all worked to
humble the old and frail body, lying
so small and helpless in the high tech bed.
Now the family stands united.
Some seem resigned; others fight
back tears, seeking comfort from
the strength of their memories
buoyed by grainy photographs
shared on smartphones
passed back and forth.

The early spring day is cold and
damp – a few snow flurries
finding wings before melting away.
Various caregivers move purposefully
in and out of the crowded room, following
routines that seem meaningless
yet comforting. At the appointed
time, a hush falls over the room – the
morphine is started, the ventilator
removed, the silent vigil begun.

In ten minutes, it's over – no
struggle, no pain, no regrets, just
simple peace at last. The family
members hug each other,
thoughtfully thank the caregivers,
then slip one-by-one from the
building, becoming quickly lost

in the gray backdrop of
another early spring day.

El Dorado

A search for gold is
a search for strength
(Poe understood this only
too well) – the strength of
a miner's lamp against the
dankest darkness, of a block
of timber in the deepest shaft,
the strength of water rushing
toward the Earth's end where
all things go to die.

Unlike Poe, I have stood
knee-deep in that cold
uncaring water, tin pan
in hand, searching for the
inner strength to continue
the quest for that glittery illusion
that makes a mockery
of old age.. But in the
darkness it drains away
with the water.