

Granddad, Waiting on Death

Granddad has been three years now
In the nursing home waiting on death.
Waiting in his privileged single room,
One among the other pastel rooms
Halled together on the ever full waiting list.

He waits in his earth bound purgatory
For a March wind to sweep away
His monogrammed identity card
Clinging to the bed-wide entry door.

He fears a slow fall for his autumn leaf,
Perhaps to be caught in the needles of the pine,
Suspended above the litter beneath,
Hoping for meaning in mankind's mulch,
The dust of community.

Granddad's dust to dust
Began with an accounting book in Iowa
And ends with books whose malingering message
Creeps past the muddled mind
And parks in the vestibule of recognition.
A thousand books after life with wife Lulu,
An after life whose prospectus predicted no gain,
Whose best option sought to avoid additional loses.

Fifteen years in his Bull Shoals cabin
Watching the solitude independence solicits
Captured in the contents of his electric frying pan.
Then, the collage of books, pinochle, and fishing
Collided with the accident on the highway,
And family declared his remaining engagements
Be moved to his son Roy's home in Ohio.

Two years in the converted den.
At least he could read and walk the driveway.
And there were some times
When life's gears slid smoothly into sync
And for a morning the smog lifted
Revealing the corners to living.

But the den occupation ended
With necessary plastic chair covers
And falls in the sponge bathroom.

Roy found him a nursing home deluxe single.
Maybe his stay would only be temporary?

He could focus on return visits,
Days when Roy might escort him "home."
In his mind, he cultivated these days,
Hoped they would be on Christmas,
For his birthday, his grandson's wedding.

Sometimes in tow with Roy,
He could cane his baby steps through the tour.
With his hearing aid on the dining room table
He could collect some of what people said,
He didn't begin to sink after the first few bites,
He could taste the apple pie
And know it was store bought.
He could declare it was "Good,"
And know he was lying.
He knew he had told that story.....before,
So, he wouldn't tell it.....now.

Those were the good days
When he could still imagine himself
Picking up the scattered sycamore twigs
On the wide-stretched front lawn,
Or smoking his stem-chewed pipe
On the flagstone terrace in Spring.

But Now.....with no return,
Granddad slides into his fourth year
In the pre-morgue.

The books departed with his eyesight.
Roy's visits on most days after work
Compete in the struggle to distinguish
The last time he was turned over
To change his soiled pajamas.

Now there is not even an accident
To wipe the accumulating film
From the listless lens of life.
The old good-day memories
Are but floating silhouettes
Devoid of any background.

Granddad.....
In his luxury storage room,
Waiting on Death.

Tom Burns
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