

Behind the Mask

Behind the inscrutable mask you may mistake
for serenity, the artists you've chosen for today's performance
are waging a furious war with their Parkinson's dragons.

They are struggling to open their eyes and pull themselves up

to sit and
swallow
the water
and fistful of pills
that will
if they're lucky
bestow the skill
to take
the first step away from the bed,

so you with the kindness to invite them, may need
to be patient.

They are climbing into showers and baths, where they may be falling and
calling for help, (if anyone's home,)

or soaking
their still-weighted bodies
in water they almost can't reach to turn off, and you may need
to help them out of the tub.

And as they emerge from the water, someone may need to catch them
before they tip forwards.

By then, if they're lucky, their pills might start to kick in, and you'll see their
once-stubborn limbs begin
at last, to glide smooth-slick as panthers, through

and out of their homes, ready,
(they're hoping)
for travel.

And once they've arrived
with greetings and smiles, sipping and spilling their coffee or tea,
it's likely that each will be checking the time, assessing when pills will begin
their decline, and they'll all try to hide it, (they hate you to know)

but their fingers will start creeping in a steady, slow stealth into pockets for
pill boxes, each in the hope

that her next dose will prevent any falls, and wishing that, just for today,
dopamine cells will agree not to grind to a halt.

And when you're all seated,
the masks rolled away,
please beware of the dancer! How might she enter the stage?
Will she rise in majestic slow-motion? Or perhaps tumble towards you
in an uncommon grace?

And next act's the gift
of a tender-fierce woman
who's brought photos she's taken of everything's souls;
yes, even those in the textures
of autumn-rich colors in Moroccan spice bowls; or the ripening ones
of
pink figs you'll suddenly long
to place
on your tongue;

and, if you can bear it, take in her glimpse of
an old woman's grace who stretches her hand out,
in exchange
for the exquisite
lines in her face.

And then turn up the mikes for the poet who hopes
as she writes this
that her voice will sing strong.

These three women are only the first act;
listen for the stirring of more,
some sitting beside you
and others within,
all waiting their chance

to ride in
on the passion
of their own
Parkinson's dragons.

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