

2018

# Hospice Visitor

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### Recommended Citation

Rowland, Russell (2018) "Hospice Visitor," *Studio One*: Vol. 43, 20.  
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## Hospice Visitor

Woman parts the curtain and steps through.  
Widowed lady: after burying two husbands,  
she'll have parted such curtains many times.

Dido in polyester. "No stranger to sorrow,  
I discovered how to reach the sorrowing."  
She moves in where angels fear to tread.

Who better acquainted with that Lazarus  
stench from the cistern of an open mouth,  
the bedsores, the eternity between breaths?

Who so remembers her own flurried hands  
trembling through a drawer for his papers,  
as strangers stood patiently in the doorway?

Who—less lately walking the lonesome vale  
nobody else can walk for you—could give  
another weeping woman at bedside, the lay

of that subdued and twilit dell; say where  
the uplands are that sunlight touches, where  
frailty turns to strength, as the broken bone

is firmer for its healing, as the broken heart  
learns compassion? No oncologist or EMT.  
To bear a cross you need a carpenter's back.

-Russell Rowland  
Meredith, NH