Hospice Visitor

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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