



## Last Visit

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Ever the gracious hostess, she strains to lift her head  
As I bring the straw to her lips.  
Delicate cheekbones, revealed by disease, summon her adolescent loveliness.  
Each breath precious, she whispers her delight  
At seeing my face.

How long since our last visit?  
Maybe four years. My daughter was three, we think.  
We catch up slowly, between inhalations;  
I want to talk and talk, but must not forget to listen  
Before I lose her again, to sleep.

I remember her fortieth birthday party.  
I was ten, too young to understand why turning forty was funny.  
My father teased her with a cake full of candles,  
Transformed, before my eyes, into an impish baby brother.  
She laughed, giddy with surprise.

Was that the moment, when the years began to slide upon themselves?  
Skittish, soft, crumpling in our hands  
Soon, I will be forty,  
My daughter will be ten,  
And my aunt will be gone.

She wakes, and I begin to name the other travelers  
On their way, now, for last visits.  
Her eyes widen, suddenly alarmed.  
“So many people! I don’t have food ready, the beds will need making,  
I need to go shopping—”

And I am soothing her, holding her, stroking her hair.  
I’ll take care of it, I whisper. Don’t you worry.  
The children from that summer day, long ago,  
Will plan one last party  
For her.

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