

# When

*(for my father)*

When mowing one ragged row  
triumphs over lungs clogged with mucous,  
shrinking toward suffocation's last thick breath

When climbing four steps exhausts, like Sisyphus' stone  
grinding down yet another hill of weak muscle,  
never quite reaching yesterday's open door

When night collapses sleep with choking half-hours,  
fumbles across bedside darkness to snatch  
one more small round of relief

It is time to relent,  
look death in the face,  
a long-neglected friend

Time to count off diminished days  
with the tattered grace of those who accept  
what cannot be changed or brought back  
from vanished power and beauty again.

It is time. Have courage.  
We watch you curl and fold,  
a paper slowly consumed by cold, thick flames  
silently, but for the rasping cough  
that spits insistence louder and louder  
against defeat.

We stand in your thinning shadow,  
unable to stop the moon's sad, sure rise,  
but, shaking hands limp at our sides,  
here, awkwardly here.

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