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## Eternity

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## Eternity

Like plants in pots, they sit along the wall,  
Breached at odd angles, wheelchairs locked,  
Or drift in tortoise-calm ahead of doting sons;

Some are still continent and wink of others  
Who seem to float in and out of being here;  
And one has balked beside the check-in desk;

A glowing shred of carrot jaunty on one lip,  
He fumbles a scary hug from each little girl  
Among the carolers from the Methodist Church

Until two nurses shush him and move him on.  
There is a snatch of sermon from the lounge,  
And then my fourth-grade teacher washes up,

And someone else—who is it?—nodding the pale  
Varicose bloom of his skull: the bald postman,  
The butcher from our single grocery store?

Or is that me, graft on another forty years?  
Will I become that lump, attached to tubes  
That pump in mush and drain the family money?

Or will I be the one who stops it with a gun,  
Or, more insensibly, with pills and alcohol?  
And would it be so wrong to free this one

Who stretches toward me from his bed and moans  
Above the constant chlorine of cleaning up  
When from further down the hall I hear the first

Transmogrifying groans: the bestial O and O  
Repeating like a mantra that travels long  
Roads of nerves to move a sound that comes

And comes but won't come finally up to words—  
Though this is the last school and passed test:  
To outlive memory and then forgetfulness. Goodbye

And hello, grandfather, the rest of your life  
Coiled around you like a rope, while one by  
One, we strange relatives lean to be recognized.