

Widow's Weeds

Inside the hospital doors, the Doctors are saving souls;
Outside, by the memorial bench, The Smokers stand united,
Drumming-up some business breath by breath.
He watches them from his hospital bed, as they gamble with their fate
Euphoria flooding veins each sullied drag.

His number's up but He knew the risk; He's a soul that can't be saved.
Laid out, so pale, with his oxygen mask, He envies all The Smokers;
He'd go out for one more, if He had the strength,
For just one more taste, for one scratch at that itch.

It's been a slow corruption, and He's paid for many years,
Though inside the hospital doors, He still longs for the rush and the high,
For carbon monoxide, nicotine, ammonia and tar,
For arsenic and cyanide to swarm his blood;
He longs to get the next fix as He's gasping for a breath,
And He's running out of breath to climb the stairs.

Intensive Care for the intensive dying, He's moving closer to God:
Plastic tubes under the skin, monitors, wires and machines.
They've cracked him open and stitched him up, removed a whole lung from his chest;
He never thought it would come to this, his last hurrah, spent here.
Youth had no incentive the way age and wisdom does,
And no disease convinces like your own.

Outside, on the memorial bench, She reads the plaques for the dead;
Her tears fall on a newspaper, smudging the news today.
She's always here for the visiting hours, each afternoon, for him,
Knows every crack on the wooden bench, and the face of every Smoker.

He's had the Judas kiss now, He's learned another word today:
They told him it's *intractable*, that nothing can be done;
And He counts all of his stitches, and He counts all of his days,
And the only way to go will be feet first.

Yet, outside by the memorial bench, The Smokers stand united,
Drumming up some business breath by breath;
And He wishes He could tell them how your Wife looks
When the Doctor shakes his head and gives the news;
He wishes He could tell them, all these years
They've wasted more than money with this curse,
And He can see it in her eyes with every kiss.

If only He could tell them how your chest feels
With one remaining lung beside your heart;
The way the air you breathe feels like elastic
That you strain to pull down deep enough inside;
How coughing feels like suffocation,
And laughter, or even kisses, steal your breath.

Inside the hospital doors the Doctors are saving souls;
The Tobacco War keeps raging, and He bears his battle scars.
She said she'll be wearing her Widow's Weeds soon,
When He's gone, and they count the cost;
And the Tobacco War keeps winning and He's on the losing side.

He watches her knitting her time into something He'll never wear;
And He takes the old news a page at a time,
Reading the newspaper where her tears fell and dried;
And He tries to ignore how the ink is all blurred now
From where She had seen it before him.

Carbon monoxide, nicotine, ammonia and tar,
Making a home in his heart, snarling up all his veins,
The gridlock of every site they've blocked, in which they've staked a claim,
The downfall of his pancreas, stomach, throat and prostate.

The Smokers take their poisons like a life enhancing tonic
While Nurses at his bedside smooth the sheets;
There are colonies in his bladder, and cities in his bones,
His one lung tries to throttle him, his veins betray his heart;
He sees her Widow's eyes with every kiss.

Lying in the dark He dreams of drowning,
Tries to catch his breath with every gasp;
He knows the final moment will come soon,
As He hears it in her voice with every sigh.

The Tobacco War keeps raging, but He's on the losing side,
Leaving her to choose her mourning clothes.

His body was the battlefield where everything was lost,
Ruined by the slow decay, and broken back to dust.
She'll add his name to the memorial bench, the latest plaque for the dead,
While outside the hospital doors, The Smokers stand united,
Drumming up some business breath by breath.