

DEATH'S KINDNESS TO THE LIVING

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Honorable Mention, Poetry

A black and sunshine yellow butterfly
Attired in a fine holiday velvet,
Vibrant against dull gray cement, rested—
Every so often its wings fluttering
In the breeze. Opaque eyes reflected dots
Of light; six legs were tucked, ready to grab
A stem or petal. I had to look twice
To see that it was dead. My son looked, too.
“See butterfly? Read books to butterfly?”
“OK,” I said. He brought his books and cup
Of milk and plopped down next to it to read.
With folks, the reaper’s not so kind. They fast
Appear sunken and gray, eyelids and jaws
Rigid. And stabs to make them look lifelike
For even brief whiles longer fail; Ashen,
Impliable skin radiates right through
Thick layers of Technicolor make-up.
I’ve heard some say their loved ones looked asleep,
At peace after having gone down in the
Eleventh or twelfth round against such foes
As cancer, stroke, and emphysema. But
I have never seen it. Even the one
Whose heart just stopped, immediately looked
Heavy and dead, a block of magnetic
Atoms toward the earth drawn.
Perhaps, though, it’s a kindness after all.
If death were as delicate with humans
As butterflies, sons, spouses, mothers, friends,
Would never be able to let them go,
To return from whence they came. By their side
The living would stay to read poetry
Or pour some tea, certain the person they
Caressed and fought and laughed with and loved—loved,
Had simply slipped away for a moment.