

VISITATION

John Stone, M.D. (1936-2008) was a well-known cardiologist who served on the Emory University School of Medicine faculty from 1969 until his death. He published five collections of poems and essays that reflect his personal commitment to his patients and his trainees. The poem reprinted here is a tender remembrance of his mother as she fails.

At Serenity Gardens, winter
has surrounded us. My mother's room
is way too warm for me,

just right for her--with an extra sweater.
Outside, this uneasy year, her 93rd,
lurches through December.

She is surely serene in this place,
thanks to whatever goodness;
queen of the electronic piano.

Among my chief duties now
I have become her human calendar,
a stay against time, her reach for the past.

Each visit, we review the years.
We sit and talk, fragile mother,
absent-minded son.

This afternoon, I assemble for her
some semblance of my long-dead
father, the only husband she had.

I tell her his story.
We study his photograph.
Do you remember him, I ask?

She looks again.
No, she answers, softly. No.
But isn't he good looking!

She smiles. I chuckle.
In the gathering dark,
we cry a bit together:

I for what she has forgotten,
she for what I remember.

— John Stone, M.D.
Music From Apartment 8: New and Selected Poems, LSU Press 2004