

POINSETTIA

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My dear Poinsettia, sunning in evening light,
How blissful I am and contentedly smug
When you gurgle and slurp with ardent delight,
From the morsel I gift you unwavering each night;
Unfiltered tap water drips from a chipped mug.

But what of the gift you bestow in return,
To act as doorman of elysian fate.
The hallowed privilege that few chance to earn,
To spend time abroad and know how you yearn
For me to lead Azazel back through our gate.

And for this I vow to bathe deep in chalk,
And gripe a rope tied around the reaper's throat.
And though time will soon steal all but root and stalk
You will live till we've drained every river and loch,
For how ignoble the healer to not keep you afloat!

But to think I would now perceive this absurd
When both fear and thorn I've held firmly at bay
To pluck the rose that sits ripe among the herd
And preclude one the right to wither unstirred,
To preserve beauty before imminent decay.

My dear Poinsettia, have I not acted in grace?
To hold you here extant – was that not my pure aim?
You have lived passed your prime, but have I been base?
Surely you are happier than that rose in that vase!
Tomorrow I shall water you just the same.

Author's note:

Poinsettia explores the modern healer's struggle through ethical metamorphosis, during an age where euthanasia and palliative care take centre stage. To treat, to heal, to prolong life; a hymn that has echoed through our halls has become a vice to surmount, and the soul so deeply perfuse with impetus is in turmoil. The poem explores a contemporary medical issue using an archaic poetry style to personify the juxtaposition of conservative values and modern ethical dilemma. In a world where contemporary expression of art and medicine is relentlessly pursued, perhaps playing homage to the ideals of the past and reflecting on the values of both art and medicine that shaped us will bring the peace we need for the modern healer to evolve.

Jason El Brihi is a psychology graduate, current medical student, and budding psychiatrist who has set himself the mission to imbue the field of medicine with the introspection of art and the wisdom of psychology.