

IN A GARDEN OF WITHERED FLOWERS

She fingers my original Peter Max tie,
Liquid blue eyes set soft with wonder.
“Pretty,” she murmurs. “So pretty.”
Her name is Patty, she looks about thirty,
Dark hair spilling over her face, her voice
A bird’s trill at dawn.

Patty was the first of those
I would meet as I arrived
At the Adult Day Center
To speak about poetry and help
Write a group poem.

Lauranne, the facilitator, a bell-shaped woman
With long, wavy wheat-blond hair, urged Patty
Away from my tie, taking her by the hand
And guiding her to a chair.
As Lauranne introduced me, I surveyed
The two dozen people gathering,
Scattered around the dining room area:

The old black woman, comfortable
In a plush chair, calmly knitting; the legless
Bald man in a wheelchair, proud of his
Green Bay Packers jersey; the thin young man
With scraggly beard, looking like Jesus
But with empty eyes; the pale girl – not more
Than twenty, her face perpetually mournful – holding
A stuffed collie and would not let go;
The blocky Asian woman of indeterminate age, wrapped
In colorful garments like a bright-winged butterfly . . .

. . . people hungering to be noticed – as people; hungering
To escape, even for a moment, what affliction
Life or circumstance has brought upon them; hungering
Just to make it through another day . . .

I read a few poems, then we started the group poem:
“Ode To Fall”. Eager voices chimed in, faster
Than Lauranne could write on the erasable board

She had set up on an easel . . . the hour was over, much too quickly;
The poem completed: it would be typed up
And published in the Day Center Newsletter.

The Asian woman approached, hands folded, and began
Bowing: I was told that she was mute, could not speak:
This was her way of showing appreciation.
I bowed in return, many times.

For that one day, that one hour, I felt
I had been a gardener, tending to flowers.
Lovely, human flowers. Not withered at all.

