Flying White

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“Let me take them,” she implores, and we resist,
But really she hardly needs to ask.
Though she comes for us all too quickly,
And much to our surprise,
We mistake her timeliness for misfortune.
More often she does not welcome us fast enough,
And for this tragedy, our roles are cast:
Physicians are denounced,
Should they admit defeat,
While this selfish seeming shade
Grasps for soul and sinew,
Making pleas from pain,
And using failing lungs as leverage,
So that weakened muscles equate to weakened spirits,
Until we lose the mental vigor
To sustain our corporeal form.

In spite of all our sophistication,
Language is all we have
To explain what path she chooses for us,
Limiting us to enlighten using words
When words are seldom more than letters.
Emphysema lacks all meaning
Until one struggles to say it aloud,
Dialysis is too terse a term
To symbolize such a terminal obligation.
Cancer is a more elegant word
When spoken,
Its lexical stress falls off like hopefulness in progress notes,
Committing its owner to a lifestyle
Of immobilizing pain,
Tempered sadly by sedation.

Where words will fail,
Pledge fealty to flags—
Whose symbols transcend simple linguistics—
And fly them proudly my friends,
Knowing there is no shame in flying white.

Listen to Dr. Siegler read this poem, available on the iPad® and Android™ devices.

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