

Visiting Hours

Helen, who sits with her bedfast husband
In the care home where stroke
Has cast him up frozen and dumb,
Knits for the passage of time by his side,
Eyes moving from him to her wools.
The whippets of yarn fall, clicked
In curls on the coverlet, and his own eyes
Turn, following the stilt-walking needles
Above him, the web spun of spreading threads
Nearing completion. Even against the room's hum
Of pulsed and recirculated air, going-away sounds
Come in: a train grieving toward the end
Of town, a car that leaves the grounds,
Departing footsteps of caretakers that return
As corridor echoes. The past returns,
To each one alone: shared time now no longer
Articulate shared, for him already gone
In the short span of his wakefulness, for her
Still mosaics of memories knit in intricate
Endless geometries of synapse and cell,
While her hand explores under sheeting, as through
Touchholes of a tomb, her afghan's cold core.

NANCY G. WESTERFIELD