

**My Father, Dying**  
**by Alastair Reid**

At summer's succulent end,  
the house is green-stained.  
I reach for my father's hand

and study his ancient nails.  
Feeble-bodied, yet at intervals  
a sweetness appears and prevails.

The heavy-scented night  
seems to get at his throat.  
It is as if the dark coughed.

In the other rooms of the house  
the furniture stands mumchance.  
Age has graved his face,

Cradling his wagged-out chin,  
I shave him, feeling bones  
stretching the waxed skin.

By his bed, the newspaper lies furled.  
He has grown too old  
to unfold the world,

which has dwindled to the size of a sheet.  
His room has a stillness to it.  
I do not call it waiting, but I wait,

anxious in the dark, to see if  
the butterfly of his breath  
has fluttered clear of death.

There is so much might be said,  
dear old man, before I find you dead;  
but we have become too separate

now in human time  
to unravel all the interim  
as your memory goes numb.

But there is no need for you to tell –  
no words, no wise counsel,  
no talk of dying well.

We have become mostly hands  
and voices in your understanding.  
The whole household is pending.

I am not ready  
to be without your frail and wasted body,  
your miscellaneous mind-way,

the faltering vein of your life.  
Each evening, I am loath  
to leave you to your death.

Nor will I dwell on  
the endless, cumulative question  
I ask, being your son.

But on any one  
of these nights soon,  
for you, the dark will not crack with dawn,

and then I will begin  
with you that hesitant conversation  
going on and on and on.

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