

## **TIDAL WAVE**

So many have passed this way before,  
ocean rising behind the door,  
the sea forestalled no more.  
What do you want of me?

So many have passed this way  
knowing what's behind the door  
needing solace and nothing more.  
What do you expect of me?

So many have passed,  
Wanting my miracle,  
not seeing the Sirens behind the door.  
Oh god, what do you demand of me?

Where in the lexicon of learning was I taught  
the wave action of this moment.  
Never, never more did I learn the pulling of the tide  
on those entrusted to me...to me.

I am not young anymore  
God damn, summon me.

So many have passed this way,  
and I, one more. Stand-down and let it pass.  
Ocean falling behind the door.  
Tidal wave...taunt me no more.

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## **PULLING THE TRIGGER**

It's near the end, the interminable end.  
Your suffering has been unbearable.  
Many months have gone by  
...and you just won't die.

No more visitors:

Your friends were first, then your family, your ex.  
the white coats and eventually even the nurses  
...except for one nurse, and she is only here  
because the guilt of your daughter was too great.

You asked me:

To put you to sleep forever,  
to give you an easy death.

But how could you know:

That 20 years ago I shook violently  
at the moment the barbiturate hit the brain  
of our 16 year old miniature poodle.  
His bright eyes faded, and closed,  
his puppy-like head slumped on my chest.

For many days thereafter, quite unexpectedly,  
I cried in private many times.

But my sadness I could not hide.

My kids asked:

“What’s wrong dad?”

“What’s wrong dad?”

And long walks, holding hands,  
enjoying simple things, being more a dad than usual  
was the only answer I could ever give.

Even today, twenty years later,  
when the end is near and interminable  
and you, my patient, asks me to kill you:  
my eyes mist, my soul aches.

My answer always is:

You, as one who suffers, deserves that option,  
but I as a doctor can never be the one who pulls  
the trigger, your executioner.

“For taking away the suffering” is the lure  
for those who would be gods.

And we, us doctors,  
are but flesh and blood.

For those who talk so causally about euthanasia  
as just another medical procedure or intervention  
have never been there when the light departs into the void  
And there is a shutter in the universe.

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## **LIFE PANEL**

The sickness has revisited  
a body wracked, invaded  
unremitting, day and night.  
Life ebbs, the verdict in.

All systems and technology failing  
maxed out with morphine and wonder drugs  
vital juices no longer flowing.  
Desperate and despondent for hope.

Who should be the jury  
no controversy or doubt  
that the end is near.  
The last great act of living here.

Life closing, shadows abound  
Decisions made by a life panel  
the one most loved who will  
loosen the rope and send me home.

Frank L. Meyskens, Jr. is Professor of Medicine, Biological Chemistry and Public Health, College of Health Sciences School of Medicine and Director, Chao Family Comprehensive Cancer Center, University of California Irvine. He writes: "I have written a lot about end of life issues including termination of life by physicians. Here are three poems:

**Tidal Wave** addresses the feelings engendered in me when a 'favorite patient' asked me quite directly to end his life. **Pulling the Trigger** was my answer. **Life Panel** was a general answer to Sarah Palin's ignorant comments about DeathPanels." His books of poetry are: *Aching for Tomorrow* (2007) and *Believing in Today* (2014).