

# Observations

Category: Poems

written by Veneta Masson | March 21, 2014

1. *Mom spends all her time saying thank you.*

Casseroles  
whole dinners  
arrive at the door,  
notes  
phone calls  
assurances of prayer  
and being there  
if something is needed,  
offers to pick up the children  
the laundry  
tidy the house  
run errands.

She's so attuned  
to gratitude  
that as each new symptom  
presents itself  
it's all she can do  
to stifle the urge  
to receive it with thanks,  
tell everyone  
how truly fortunate she feels,  
how blessed.

2. *Mom has celebrated five days of feeling so much better.*

That's what it comes down to?  
what you suffer for,  
eking out a living  
from the hard scrap  
of this illness?

five good days  
counted out begrudgingly  
by some miserly paymaster  
with a raspy voice  
who points and says  
*Sign here?*

And what can you do  
with five good days  
six kids

a spouse  
a house  
and a cat—

fly to Tahiti  
and lie on the beach  
dreaming?

As profligate  
with your five good days  
as the child with five loaves  
and two fishes

I picture you out among the crowd  
gladly giving them away.

3. *We've made Mom's pillow the crying pillow  
and we all take turns.*

Joy buries her face  
in the crying pillow.  
It is her turn  
to throw herself down  
on the made-up bed  
    her mother's wide bed  
    her mother's soft pillow  
and sob out her grief  
with the whole  
of her ten-year-old self.

A mound of wet tissues  
grows up around her.  
First lesson of this motherless life—  
you wipe your own tears  
then, dry-eyed and limp,  
    you breathe a sigh  
    you rise.

#### **About the poet:**

Veneta Masson is a nurse and poet living in Washington, D.C. She has written three books of essays and poems, drawing on her experiences over twenty years as a family nurse practitioner and director of an inner-city clinic. Information about her poetry collection *Clinician's Guide to the Soul* is available at [sagefemmepress.com](http://sagefemmepress.com).

#### **About the poem:**

“Several years have passed since she died, but I still vividly remember receiving dispatches from what I thought of as ‘the house haunted by illness’—my sister’s house. Some I witnessed. These three took root in my imagination and eventually resulted in a trilogy of poems. I offer them as a

tribute to my sister, our family and all the other families who share our experience. It's also my hope that they'll open the door a little wider to clinicians who wonder (as I have wondered) about their patients' lives outside the hospital or clinic."

**Poetry editors:**

Johanna Shapiro and Judy Schaefer