Vaccination Day

Three of Five Pieces

Malcolm Parker

Received: 5 November 2013 / Accepted: 5 December 2013 / Published online: 17 May 2014
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They enter
in curves and stoops
limping and tapping
a file of bare arms
creased faces uplifted
red eyelids pouting
eyes curtained in cataract.
The syringes are magazined at his hip.

A pinch of skin
in a chill autumn morning
a stinging spreads out
at the borders of shoulders
the grim supplication
for all his attention
the trembling smile
on his remembering a name.

Swabs spent in buckets
the names all collected
a shifting and ambling

across the lawns to their lives
on small porches
and in dim echoing cells.

Washing his hands
of the short easy morning
those bird-bone arms
grow stars of David
in the injected wheals
and the upturned heads
pull at his neck
for a sparklet of mercy
he prodding them down
into the frost
from the stinking trains
at the point of more serious weaponry.

They are a herd
fanning out to their winding down days
dark-eyed ones shuffling blind
to other deaths, gassed and limed.

M. Parker (✉)
School of Medicine, University of Queensland,
St Lucia, Brisbane, QLD 4072, Australia
e-mail: m.parker@uq.edu.au