

The Angel of Death

(for Daniel del Solar)

by Nina Serrano

*Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rage at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*
— Dylan Thomas

The angel of death last night was with us
who sat vigil at Daniel's house in his long hours
struggling to let go of life
Daniel—so devoted
to sucking its sweetness from moments and seconds
Discovering people antiquities rocks shells papers vistas sunsets
blown-glass and art of every description
in his hour by hour adventures —
I had played his poem on the air that afternoon
and a listener called saying
he had met that man reciting the poem
in front of a glassed display of Jadeite
at the Olmeca exhibit at the de Young Museum
and the man gave him his card which he lost
and now hearing the poem
and the voice he was sure it was Daniel
who had admired the stone out loud
and in response the caller
pulled one just like it from his pocket
and Daniel had marveled.
Now the listener said, he was sitting in his garden in the sunlight listening to the radio
working on such a piece of Jadeite
when he heard the poem he wanted to give Daniel this work
I said sardonically (to hide my pain) "Too late he is dying"
He said, "I can finish today. I will bring it."
So even in Daniel's dying
these adventurous encounters go on
The poem the stone carving and me
witness of this marvel of flesh and bone
that shrunken and bloated with fluid and bruised

with the battle scars of the wrestling with the angel of death
who licked at his heels for these last six years
as he jumped on and off planes as fast
as his electronic cameras could click
and I would pick him up at the airport —
Now the eternal angel spreads those mighty wings
We the caring giving sisters can hear the invisible swish of air in our vigil
The Hospice brings its death by morphine
but it is nothing compared to this greater force
“Do not go gentle into that good night...”
Daniel would quote and I would think
“Gentle. Gentle is the way to go. Why rage rage rage?”
Now I watch him weakened and sedated
and Yes! He is raging raging raging
I and my vigilant loving sisters and his glorious mother
the queen of art will bathe him in light
to go gentle gentle gentle
onto the next journey

*Nina Serrano: This poem was written on January 6, 2012 as 3 Kings passed following a star
in Oakland CA.*