

Unwelcome Visitors

I first encountered Dolor as a child.

If I received a knock or fall, he smiled.

They called him Dolor, God of Pain, but he

Was more a coward than a deity.

No noble visage did his image make,

He'd lurk and seize upon your least mistake.

Foul Dolor was grotesque in every way:

He'd gladly take an innocent as prey.

In middle age I noticed Dolor back,

As in he crept to once again attack.

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He'd brought a new device to try on me,

Its name, peripheral neuropathy.

As bit by bit my health and strength he stole,

He moved into the attic of my soul.

I can't be sure when she moved in as well,

That Desperatio, his wife from Hell.

The Goddess of Despair was sly and cruel,

Together, my whole being they sought to rule.

While Dolor's torment was a mortal kind,

Desperatio whispered in my mind,

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And so I spiralled down as they both played,

My soul and body inwardly decayed.

But Mathematics was my craft and creed,

I'd worshiped Reason both in thought and deed.

So, now to Sapientia I prayed

To send her acolyte her blessed aid.

I couldn't do what I had done before,
So Reason said to simply close that door.

Discover now the person I could be,
Despite the pain of my neuropathy.

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I had a skill and love for writing verse,
A craft to do when well, and stop when worse.

And so a writer Reason made of me,

And to my life she gave me back the key.

First, Desperatio I put to flight,

Then Dolor, locked out back and out of sight.

The Goddess of Fulfilment moved inside,

Henceforth, Expletio was by my side.

And from that victory I came to tell

How I was able then to live life well!

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Latin Glossary

dolor, -oris, 3rd declension, masculine
desperatio, -onis, 3rd declension, feminine
sapientia, -ae, 1st declension, feminine
expletio, -onis, 3rd declension, feminine

pain
despair
reason, wisdom
fulfilment

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This poem was entered into the Health Poetry Prize competition 2016 sponsored by the Dean of the Faculty of Health, University of Canberra. The 2016 Theme was "Living Life Well". The poem tells of the author's struggle with the pain and despair of the peripheral neuropathy that forced him into early retirement as a Mathematics professor, and how through creative writing and essay writing he found fulfilling activities that he could practise in his retirement. In the poem, 'pain', 'despair', 'reason' and 'fulfilment' are characterized as Gods and Goddesses influencing the author's life, with these deities named by their Latin equivalents. The poem is written as heroic couplets of iambic pentameters, chosen to give the poem the feel of a struggle against an adversary. (June 2016)