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| **In the Snack-bar**A cup capsizes along the formica,slithering with a dull clatter.A few heads turn in the crowded evening snack-bar.An old man is trying to get to his feetfrom the low round stool fixed to the floor.Slowly he levers himself up, his hands have no power.He is up as far as he can get. The dismal humplooming over him forces his head down.He stands in his stained beltless gaberdinelike a monstrous animal caught in a tentin some story. He sways slightly,the face not seen, bent downin shadow under his cap.Even on his feet he is staring at the flooror would be, if he could see.I notice now his stick, once painted whitebut scuffed and muddy, hanging from his right arm.Long blind, hunchback born, half paralysedhe standsfumbling with the stickand speaks:‘I want – to go to the – toilet.’It is down two flights of stairs, but we go.I take his arm. ‘Give me – your arm – it’s better,’ he says.Inch by inch we drift towards the stairs.A few yards of floor are like a landscapeto be negotiated, in the slow setting outtime has almost stopped. I concentratemy life to his: crunch of spilt sugar,slidy puddle from the night’s umbrellas,table edges, people’s feet,hiss of the coffee-machine, voices and laughter,smell of a cigar, hamburgers, wet coats steaming,and the slow dangerous inches to the stairs.I put his right hand on the railand take his stick. He clings to me. The stickis in his left hand, probing the treads.I guide his arm and tell him the steps.And slowly we go down. And slowly we go down.White tiles and mirrors at last. He shamblesuncouth into the clinical gleam.I set him in position, stand behind himand wait with his stick.His brooding reflection darkens the mirrorbut the trickle of his water is thin and slow,an old man’s apology for living.Painful ages to close his trousers and coat – I do up the last buttons for him.He asks doubtfully, ‘Can I – wash my hands?’I fill the basin, clasp his soft fingers round the soap.He washes, feebly, patiently. There is no towel.I press the pedal of the drier, draw his handsgently into the roar of the hot air.But he cannot rub them together,drags out a handkerchief to finish.He is glad to leave the contraption, and face the stairs.He climbs, and steadily enough.He climbs, we climb. He climbswith many pauses but with that onepersisting patience of the undefeatedwhich is the nature of man when all is said.And slowly we go up. And slowly we go up.The faltering, unfaltering stepstake him at last to the dooracross that endless, yet not endless waste of floor.I watch him helped on a bus. It shudders off in the rain.The conductor bends to hear where he wants to go.Wherever he could go it would be darkand yet he must trust men.Without embarrassment or shamehe must announce his most pitiful needsin a public place. No one sees his face.Does he know how frightening he is in his strangenessunder his mountainous coat, his hands like wet leavesstuck to the half-white stick?His life depends on many who would evade him.But he cannot reckon up the chances,having one thing to do,to haul his blind hump through these rains of August.Dear Christ, to be born for this! | The speaker helps a blind old man whilst out for coffee. Alliteration – uses hard ‘c’ sound to emphasise the sound of the cup spilling. Word choice – ‘slowly’ emphasises the cautiousness of the man. Word choice – ‘levers’ emphasises his careful movements. Word choice – the man is clearly disabled. He gets our sympathy. Simile – his shape is all crooked like something stuck in a tent. The speaker realises that the old man is blind and needs help. The man’s speech is broken. This suggests his care over everything but also his helplessness. Word choice – the speaker is there to support and floats around the old man.List of things the old man and the speaker must get around. This shows how treacherous the trip to the toilet is for the old man as he can’t see. The focus is on sounds as this is what the old man would hear as his most reliable sense. Word choice – the old man gets security from the speaker. Word choice – he has to test everything first. We get a sense of how patient both men have to be here. Repetition of ‘slowly’ tells how much time they take to do something simple. Word choice – ‘uncouth’ = rough, ‘clinical’ = sterileWord choice – ‘trickle’ again highlights the weakness of the old man.Question shows again how feeble the old man is. The word choice here shows how much care must be taken with the old man. This section here keeps repeating ‘climbs’ which shows how laborious and difficult it is for the old man to now get himself back up to the café section. The speaker recognises that even though the old man is slow he makes a point of still making progress. Repetition – ‘slowly we go up’ further highlights the length of time and the amount of effort it takes the old man to go up the stairs. Personification – the bus judders, its movements like the old man. Simile – the old man’s hands are wet leaves because they are both lacking any strength. Word choice – shows that many people do not want to help, probably because they are embarrassed. Irony. The speaker cries out to Jesus for help in this helpless situation. If people were being good, then they would help the old man but they don’t. |

The poem is written about an ordinary every-day situation but Morgan goes into detail about it. A blind man knocks over his cup in a café.

The poem is in free verse in three stanzas. It is in present tense and this creates a feeling of immediacy in the poem (like it is happening right now).

Stanza 1 describes the old man in detail.

Stanza 2 describes having to take the old man to the toilet.

Stanza 3 reflects on having to care for the old man.