

I Wonder What They Pray For

by [Graham Cunningham](#) (August 2019)



Spring in Central Park, Adolf Dehn, 1941

As I watch them in the park
spry old couple, ninety odd
hearts re-bored and tooled up
with walking, hearing, seeing aids
a twinkle even in the eye
leaning close, holding hands

these taller, longer-living things
our ever-lengthening DNA string
she blushes, he grins, I wonder who
we must thank?

The gentleman scientist medicine man?
Pioneer, fingering his waistcoat chain
furrowed brow at his flaming hearth
his passion to know the biology that drove
his father to build the family name
and his mother to die giving birth to him.
Or the coming of the public drain?
The engineers who drove it on
dug by expendables who died
in the cause of Health & Safety.

What must they make of Clipboard Man
auditing the park?
Access Officer—a safe job
checking on the work
of trained operatives painting rails
in yellow and in black;

he eyes the tree trunks
ponders threats that they might represent
to reckless children playing;
old couples with failing sight.

And if they should trip on broken flags
will they tut and laugh; or
will they be prey to Clipboard Youth
prowling in the park?

“Any injuries or accidents Ma’am?”
With his one-day-training, menacing charm
his plastic wallet and his trust-me tag
will they recognise his kind
or has fifty years of filling forms
left their instincts paper-thin?

I wonder what they pray for now their lifetime journey’s run
from church up aching Sunday hill
to a picnic in the park.

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