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Jackpot

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JACKPOT

We're all here in Vegas—the look-alike Elvis,
Ringo Starr, Sammy Davis, Jr. . . .
I shuffle into the clinic with the other
arthritic for one more quack cure, drop
my money in the slot. Oh, it's hot!
The handle too warm to touch, the desert sun
outside bleaching the lizard's skull.
I bet on the reptiles, on the scaly-skinned,
the spadefoot toad who burrows backwards
and sleeps seven feet down in the sand.
I go with the insects who breed and feed at night,
with the single-celled protozoa protected
from the heat by its own cyst.
I bet on the woman on the couch with
a growth on her cheek, the seven year old
in cowboy boots with eczema head to toe.
I roll for the shaky hand, spastic muscle, drooling lip.
I roll for the palsied girl that she may walk,
the diapered man that he may no longer drip.
For I have faith in the communion of waiting rooms
and know the inside secret of wheelchairs,
IV poles, crutches and canes.
I know the woman weeping on the examining table.
She raises the ante and bets on Death Valley.
I bet on the shuttle bus back to the motel near the casino,
the ice machine, the clean plop into the bucket,
the fresh towels and *Gideon Bible* in the desk drawer.
I bet on the *Book of Mormon* next to the fish tank,
the *Newsweek* with Oliver North on the cover.
Yes, I roll for the silver dollar, the neon,
salamander and tadpole, the quicky marriage of the
kissing gouramis behind the glass. I wait for the
cloudburst, the once or twice a year puddle,
the underground tests to explode.