*A Vigil Wearing a Mink Fur*

(To caregivers and their charges)

By Jasmine Gatti

Fingers plow across the nap

of thick mink.

I am like that lush, brown fur that

hides the deep dead skin,

protecting you from

the pain of the last moments.

Why do I wrap this death mink

across my shoulders--

after all, the owner label is embroidered with your name?

I drag cloak—

to cover and shelter

You from the bitter winter

This Armor protects

You from the inevitable

Stank as you ripen,

Seeping to an expiry date.

Why do I seek to

hold sunken hands,

Take your weighty unction

as if it were mine for the keeping?

Sincere and full of meaning you are resolute, yet

I can’t understand the mumbles of parched lips,

painted on a fallow mask--

babbling sense to the ears of another world,

a limitless nether world,

heaven’s world.

Why do I watch with these friends, as

They remove

this coat,

laying it on barren bodies?

I do know why.

Watch as the vigil

collects the ritual wicked candles

bouncing its shadows

Moment by moment across the shiny fur and faces.

We are reminded,

Together,

all approach death,

as innocent bystanders.