

Morgan likes to record real events: 'the grit of the facts of the case.'
'In the Snack Bar', by Edwin Morgan - Details are precise and exact: no romanticising.

Stanza 1

- detail: table is easily wiped down.
- 1 A cup capsizes along the formica,
- 2 slithering with a dull clatter.
- 3 A few heads turn in the crowded evening snack-bar.
- detail: only a few people are aware of the old man, OR only a few care.
- 4 An old man is trying to get to his feet
- 5 from the low round stool fixed to the floor. detail - this would be uncomfortable and awkward.
- 6 Slowly he levers himself up, his hands have no power.
- 7 He is up as far as he can get. The dismal hump transferred epithet: it's not the hump that is dismal, but it has made the man's life dismal.
- 8 looming over him forces his head down.
personification: the hump has beaten down the man, as if deliberately.
- 9 He stands in his stained beltless gabardine
alliteration: draws attention to the man's shabbiness
- 10 like a monstrous animal caught in a tent
simile: this dehumanises the old man, and emphasises how separate he seems from the other people.
- 11 in some story. He sways slightly,
- 12 the face not seen, bent down
- 13 in shadow under his cap.
- 14 Even on his feet he is staring at the floor

In Stanza 1, the narrator seems unsympathetic to the old man - he simply observes him.

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15 or would be, if he could see.

16 I notice now his stick, once painted white detail: this shows the man can't - for any number of reasons - maintain his belongings.

17 but scuffed and muddy, hanging from his right arm.
word choice: shows the man has no strength or control of his grip.

18 Long blind, hunchback born, half paralysed
list of problems builds them up

19 he stands
short line emphasises how impressive this action is.

20 fumbling with the stick

21 and speaks:
punctuation: dashes may show embarrassment or trouble speaking.

22 'I want - to go to the - toilet.'

Stanza 2

In Stanza 2, our perception of the narrator changes. He helps the old man and experiences the world (partly) as he does.

23 It is down two flights of stairs, but we go.

24 I take his arm. 'Give me - your arm - it's better,' he says.
the old man has some agency.

25 Inch by inch we drift towards the stairs.
word choice: drift has connotations of lightness and frailty.

26 A few yards of floor are like a landscape
simile: shows how major an undertaking this is.

27 to be negotiated, in the slow setting out

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28 time has almost stopped. I concentrate

Key idea of the poem.

29 my life to his: crunch of spilt sugar,

30 slidy puddle from the night's umbrellas,

31 table edges, people's feet,

32 hiss of the coffee-machine, voices and laughter,

33 smell of a cigar, hamburgers, wet coats steaming.

Details are from senses of touch, smell, and hearing.

34 and the slow dangerous inches to the stairs.

word choice: it's odd that inches would be considered dangerous.

35 I put his right hand on the rail

word choice: connotations of vulnerability and frailty.

36 and take his stick. He clings to me. The stick

37 is in his left hand, probing the treads.

word choice: connotations of carefulness and hesitation

38 I guide his arm and tell him the steps.

39 And slowly we go down. And slowly we go down.

repetition: gives sense of repetitiveness of task, and length of time it takes.

40 White tiles and mirrors at last. He shambles

word choice

41 uncouth into the clinical gleam.

contrast

A vivid and dangerous picture of the snack bar is built up - one dangerous for the old man.

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42 I set him in position, stand behind him

43 and wait with his stick.

44 His brooding reflection darkens the mirror

45 but the trickle of his water is thin and slow,

46 an old man's apology for living.

47 Painful ages to close his trousers and coat -

48 I do up the last buttons for him.

49 He asks doubtfully, 'Can I - wash my hands?'

50 I fill the basin, clasp his soft fingers round the soap.

51 He washes, feebly, patiently. There is no towel.

52 I press the pedal of the drier, draw his hands

53 gently into the roar of the hot air.

54 But he cannot rub them together,

55 drags out a handkerchief to finish.

contrast: the old man's almost threatening appearance vs. his weak wincing.

metaphor: like an apology, it's humble and meek.

word choice metaphor: it's like an extreme length of time.

word choice: he could be doubtful about whether the narrator will continue to help him.

word choice: 'soft' contrasts with the man's appearance

word choice: connotations of danger and threat and power

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word choice: connotations of complexity and difficulty

56 He is glad to leave the contraption and face the stairs.

57 He ^{x1}climbs, and steadily enough.

repetition of climb

58 He ^{x2}climbs, ^{x3}we climb. He ^{x4}climbs

Key idea in poem.

59 with many pauses but with that one

> alliteration: draws attention

60 persisting patience of the undefeated

61 which is the nature of man when all is said.

62 And slowly we go up. And slowly we go up.

repetition: mirrors their earlier descent and gives sense of time and labour.

63 The faltering, unfaltering steps

— contradictory

64 take him at last to the door

65 across that endless, yet not endless waste of floor.

word choice: connotations of inhospitalableness and wilderness

— 'contradictory

66 I watch him helped on a bus. It shudders off in the rain.

> details - others help the man.

67 The conductor bends to hear where he wants to go.

Stanza 3

68 Wherever he could go it would be dark

Stanza 3 - The narrator reflects on his experience with the old man.

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69 and yet he must trust men.

70 Without embarrassment or shame

71 he must announce his most pitiful needs

72 in a public place. No one sees his face.

73 Does he know how frightening he is in his strangeness

74 under his mountainous coat, his hands like wet leaves

75 stuck to the half-white stick?

76 His life depends on many who would evade him.

77 But he cannot reckon up the chances,

78 having one thing to do,

79 to haul his blind hump through these rains of August.

80 Dear Christ, to be born for this!

Invokes God/Jesus

Exclamation
mark adds emotion

Summing up the
daily experience of
the old man.

literally: his head is bowed, people don't look.
metaphorically: people don't think of
him as a person - they
see his sickness
and disability.

contrast: idea of strength and threat (appearance)
idea of weakness and softness (truth)

Key line 3 - Idea that it
must be horrible to exist in
such a condition.