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1952

There you sit in the open cockpit
I never saw such a smile
Goggles pushed up on your head
Shoulders harnessed with a parachute
To keep you safe
This would be before you were on 9 carriers
Before exile to Viet Nam
Before your children surrounded you like stars
Waiting for your kiss
Before the Autumns of our lives
Before there would be no Autumns
Before I said don't fly away
Before you would become someone else
Then back again
Before there would be so much sun outside without you
Before the winds were light and variable
Before you'd sit on the front step every time
I went to the store waiting for my return
There you are sitting in a cockpit of an SNJ
Smiling at me for all eternity
In a moment that could not last
Cleared for flight
Everything in the whole blue world
Ahead of you.

Going South

I love to think of it
Traveling south that time

Thirty years ago
Stopping

A sunlit town
A weekday afternoon

A town so small
Four corners with

Its children
Coming home from school

Green lawns, sweet air
Georgia or

Some other foreign place
Never seen before

No highways then
Bypassing

Sounds
Of people walking, talking

Three o'clock far away
My shoulders, a pink halter

No one dead
My mother, father, sister still alive

Nothing much to worry me
But the road

Ahead
Flowers, soft aromas

Strange trees
And a restaurant

I see just where we sat
That corner over there

The smell and feel of honey
But most of all warm sun

Beside a road
By a car headed south

Flavors of a southern town
Years ago, my first time down.

Bliss, 1986

One Year Ago Today

(January, 2014)

You came into the kitchen and I was making tea--- and you said
I feel a little debilitated today
You wore your warm grey sweatshirt
But your hands were shaking
And you said
I'll just take some cough medicine and go on back to bed
This was hours before the ambulance

Today, one year later, I feel a little debilitated myself
So I took some cough medicine and went back to bed
And dreamed you wanted to come Christmas shopping
You wanted to come with me to get yourself a gift
a Science kit for sculpting
As yours was empty
I had one bag left that we could use

I took my floppy hat and biked down the hill
And stopped to call you at McDonalds
But my phone was home with you
The nice Asian girl let me use hers but you didn't answer
So up the hill I went to tell you where we'd meet
And you were there! You were here!

In your bright red sweater in my office in my chair
Today Of all days
You always said that you knew how to thrill me
And you do you do you were there.

I Am Not Lazy. This Is One Thing I Am Not

I keep a tidy kitchen.
When irreparable damage had been done
I gave up smoking but for maybe just
One cigar a day. I emptied all the trays.
When news reached us of the undue
Hardships I divided the wind as
A factor, the speed as a factor
And puffed up the pillows in the next room.
When armies of enemies and friends advanced
Unlimited, I saw someone who looked
Like your wife and bought a
Picture of her for you to put on your desk.
When bullets hit dead center I said
What is the use of all the people we
Did not love and who did not love us.
I put them out with the garbage.
Before we killed an animal for
Supper we begged his pardon on
Our knees like Cherokees.
When strong currents ripped away
The walls I claimed it was the
Only way to stop the runaway cars.
Tasting the air like snakes without
Noses we've crawled along a long time
Finding our directions.
That's why I can honestly say I am

And have always been a good if not excellent
Housekeeper.

Why I Cannot Take A Lover, 1975

Garden Party

This isn't so bad I said. Everything's the same. You're just not here. Look. I get up and make tea and you're just not here, that's all. I go swimming. I shop and I can carry groceries in with just one hand now. I can keep the house tidy and I don't have to cook. I watch movies. This is the life. Then I called you at four for tea. And you didn't answer. No matter how many times, you still didn't. Then the cat grew into a dog with pink eyes and shaggy matted fur, the grass already sodden with rain was watered all night with the hose. The people who came talked about the wrong books. I couldn't make them understand it was the young librarian not the movie critic. You said you'd take the cat to the vet, you said you didn't care what it cost, you'd put new sod down, you said you'd make everyone understand what I was trying to say. I kept calling and calling because I know the dead have memory. I know you remember my name. Everyone is here waiting.

Tarot Card VI. The Lovers

Having loved me when I was young
and now when I am not,
you are twice blessed
for giving
a rich person a gift.

In no one else's dream but yours,
I will be the old lady
wearing a white straw hat
with a red satin bow
who says Thank you.

Sit Down, Says Love, 1996

Looking at the Sight of His Back

*I am sorry for your loss Please Accept My condolences for your loss
Our sympathies I am sorry Accept my condolences So sorry truly
My condolences for your loss Our sympathies for your loss Please*

We rise to tea and homemade bread,
talk of a friend and read a prayer,
go swimming, nap, take a
machine to the fixer, cook pasta
in clam sauce, we drink vodka
martinis, how we complain about
our last house guest, we light a fire
in the fireplace, eat dinner
read a book, the day
slips beneath our surface,
how long were the shadows
tucked into the sly folds of our
marriage, we kept looking at the
sky trying to make sense of it,
no one else could do that for us,
those who loved us and left
no longer mattered. If we stop telling this story
it will go away.

What I Won

The sack dress was in style then
 with a single strand of pearls.
The sack dress was designed to see
 the body move lightly beneath.
That's why I wore it to my first poetry
 contest in Philly,
leaving my four-month-old at home.
 Of course my husband had to
drive, as nervous as I was
 so he waited in the car all
day while I sat in the big room, first time out
 since I found my mother
dead and then had a baby two weeks later.
 My husband stayed all day in that
car in the snow. I won first prize about
 wanting my mother but
It was said much better than this,
 as you can imagine, to win first.
It even began with *notes upon a phantom*
 lute, although The Poet
said what do we know of lutes now?
 But what did he know of
walking into her bedroom and finding
 her a pale shade of lilac.

That just goes to prove I guess I was talking
about the wrong thing in the poem,
and The Poet was surely on to something.
I have to say I looked wonderful,
gaunt with grief and colitis, 1956,
hurrying across the street
where my husband was waiting to take me home,
the first wrong victory in my hand.

Sounds Like Something I Would Say, 2010

The Corner Street Café

Last night my husband and I had to cancel our performance.
We'd been practicing it for years.
The script—
Our parts—
We even carried firewood up the stairs. All the props were there.
The audience was small, as usual, at the Corner Street Café
But our loyal friends were waiting for us when we walked in.
I announced that we were cancelling the play tonight and, of course
Apologized for inconvenience.
Some were relieved with important planes to catch. Others,
Like the Director, were a little more insistent. "Just give a reading,
Say a poem, do something, anything. They all came here for you."
I looked at the sorry script in my hand held together through the years
Stapled, bent and smeared.
I couldn't put the actors through that, I thought.
I then said that line aloud and the audience cheered.
"Read a poem," my husband said, since everyone is seated.
I did. Then a brave young woman in a purple knit blouse stood,
"I applaud you for not putting this on.
It is so cruel to the characters in the script,
depicting them with such pain and loss."
This was turning out to be a Q & A without a play,
"Why did you cancel something so well-rehearsed for so many years?"
We forgot the technical part, I admitted. We never brought the audio.

My husband and I are still together, I explained, and will be forever.
But without his life support equipment there's no communication.
He just cannot be heard.