Spoken Candles for All Souls

Men Are Filled with Grief

To Tom and Ron

Berkeley coffee beckoned us together father-figure and mentee sharing that pulse of pain down the right leg.

Between bites I conjured the memory, the anguish when unrelenting suffering locked you into a curtained room to wait out

the end.

And he says:

Men are filled with grief
And they must walk through it.

For ten months I gritted my teeth each morning walked the one block the fates still granted me.

For ten months I tossed for escape each night sought the comfort of curling sideways

first right,

then left.

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Men must walk through grief.

And the next moment grief cut off his voice.

Just like that recalled embodied prison the pain shooting down, weaving itself into the fabric of your life encasing me into upper body freedom, the silence stretching into dread of forever.

Grief lengthened wordlessly into

a disembodied touch.

I wanted to hug you. At least extend my hand for one caress

in solidarity.

#

Saltspring Two

I always make the best of things, you say, measuring mayonnaise for salad night, with fresh eggs and fresh parsley we make magic out of summer's bounty.

I sit in the tall chair in the corner your surface-sister I

have your eyes one arm on the bar, one hand on my knee I do nothing

but watch.

You tell me you're mom here, make sure the guests tuck in a good breakfast.

Your mouth's already pressed together, your arms tire daily dough into bread.

I'm a Samurai in a Mustang doing four hundred miles a day. I know Valhalla will fall to the giants. My L.A. is only a training ground.

You couldn't take it, you say, walking close to the lights to spot trouble, abandoning the sidewalk for lit traffic avoiding dark corners breathing gun-fire.

Outside my car purrs awake at a warning,
The headlights reach into our kitchen,
they drain our faces, turn us into black-and-whites,
Alert my sword-mind to Columbian forest shadows.

We blend potatoes into vinaigrette
I hold the bowl, you scoop the onions,
I think about the two years you taught
water safety
when spring melts open the Yukon shores,
and your summer's respite on Saltspring Island.

You know warriors are lost to peace, yet you draw me into this other life hand me bread and the gift of your welcome.

#

Water on the heart

To Billy

In the hospital you missed foamy lather, the weight of wet hair curling in your hands. Under my towel I spot the red mark where lasers stung away brown skin. But you display your other scar between your ribs, witness to your heart trouble: It is the pump and not the blood, you tell us with a gesture, raised shirt like a white flag.

Water on the heart, pressing in on that limited organ, your human body shrinking slowly, pressing in on our squeezed soul.

Your voice splashes cheer at your survival, I coo along for good measure.

When I leave,
determined not to let my heart
give out

I kiss you good bye.

#

In Memoriam/Day of the Dead

To Anne, 1956 - 1994

Once imminent death gave you the bluest eyes, a gaze so clear

it cut

to another horizon.

¡Espantosa!

La mirada de un alma despegándose ya de nuestro camino.

¡Espantoso!

Mirar a un alma ya quitada de su disfrace cotidiano.

Shall I wrestle with you now? Shall I light a candle on All Soul's to keep you close?

No, este espanto lo adoro. Ya se que lo buscaré cuando me empiece a atragar

el olvido.

Yes, I cherish this haunting.

I turn to San Gabriel's Peak tanto tiempo que pasaste bajo su sombra to hear you dancing

across

the brown ridges

flowing into the sky northeast of the city of angels.

Acercandose la muerte te regaló los ojos más azules, una mirada tan lucida

que cortaba

hacia otro horizonte.

Frightening!

The gaze of a soul ready to begin our next journey.

Haunting!

To look at a soul bared of the routines of daily life.

¿Y ahora con que me pongo a la lucha? ¿Te mantendre cerca encendiendo una vela en el día de los muertos?

No, I shall cherish this haunting. I shall seek it out when forgetting begins

to swallow me.

Si, este espanto lo adoro.

Me volteo hacia la cumbre de San Gabriel you spent so much time in its shadow para seguir tu baile

cruzando

las lomas castañas

que corren hacia el cielo al noreste de la ciudad de los angeles.