

## The Color of Comfort

I am choosing colors for a baby blanket,  
yarns of yellow, lavender, iridescent pearl,  
And a bright coral pink  
That is the color of my mother's dress.

My mother's dress –  
the one she wore so much at the end –  
was one she had sewn  
from a complicated pattern  
with rows of covered buttons down the front  
fastened through fabric loops.  
She wore it to parties and dinners  
and to her last Christmas  
with Dad's family.  
It was a dress  
she had made for "good"  
one that she wore with pride.

But in the end,  
it was the only thing she wore.  
Did Dad help her dress?  
Was it what he liked to see her in  
with the bright coral shade  
that brought fire  
back into her cheeks; or  
was it just what he grabbed  
the first time he reached into her closet  
and thereafter was just the easiest thing  
to get her into?

Or did she choose the dress herself  
because it had always been a favorite,  
because she had always been proud  
of how she looked  
and felt  
while wearing it.  
Because it put fire in her cheeks.  
and brought pride back  
into her demeanor  
so many years after she had ceased  
to spend her days  
in the sewing room.

It is in this dress  
that I remember her,  
that she was wearing so many times

during those last days,  
weeks, and months --  
her pride intact,  
her smile still strong,  
the fire in her cheeks  
reflecting that bright coral dress.

As I choose colors now,  
yarns of yellow, lavender, iridescent pearl,  
and a bright coral pink  
for a baby blanket,  
I reflect on why I am so drawn to  
that bright coral pink.

Then I see again my mother  
in that dress she made for good  
and began wearing daily  
like a house dress,  
a house dress that put fire in her cheeks.

And I realize that color  
is one of the ways we can  
vividly see the Lord's grace,  
for colors can ease our tired eyes at the end of a workday  
or at the end of a well-spent life,  
and led my mom to select the coral dress  
to put her own eyes -- and days --  
to rest.

## Wyberg Lane

My father took his last ride  
down Wyberg Lane,  
arriving at the emergency room  
with fluids  
compressing his heart.  
For one night longer,  
I rested easily,  
unaware that the moment of comfort  
in which I'd last seen him  
had also been his last.

When I went to his side,  
I acted brave, casual, positive.  
It was absurd, I now realize,  
to deny Death  
when it is waiting so patiently  
right there in the room.

They waited together,  
Death and my father,  
for the right moment, after I had gone,  
with no one else expected.  
It was, I believe, what they both wanted,  
both patiently waiting,  
for that quiet moment alone.

Then, when the alarm that they sounded  
at the nurses' station  
could not be answered quickly enough,  
they exited together.  
Together,  
arm in arm (I picture them now)  
one in a full-length dark hooded cape  
the other in a too short, baggy  
white hospital gown  
with just a flash of cheek  
before they disappeared into the  
fog and mystery of the Beyond.

When next I drove down Wyberg Lane,  
I thought I heard Dad chuckle:  
'You can't go back again.'

Indeed, I never do  
but what I think  
of his last passing there.

Elegy

Sixfold Poetry Submission, 10/24/2023

## Pantoum for my Brother

My brother is gone:  
he has crossed the bar to our parents.  
He can't answer my questions now;  
I am left like a child in the dark.

He has crossed the bar to our parents  
in a strong boat Our Father has built.  
I am left like a child in the dark:  
my husband has been long at sea.

In a strong boat our father has built,  
Faith guiding him through the fog,  
my husband has been long at sea.  
I can feel my brother's presence:

Faith guiding him through the fog,  
like a crescent moon embracing the darkness.  
I can feel my brother's presence:  
I can feel him, but I cannot touch him.

Like a crescent moon embracing the darkness  
I curl up behind the sailor returned.  
I can feel him, but I cannot touch him –  
I let him sleep off his voyage.

I curl up behind the sailor returned –  
he can't answer my questions now:  
I let him sleep off his voyage.  
My brother is gone.

## Aperitif

On the day his sister called with her news  
I took my husband to the wine bar.  
We tasted a flight of wines from the Loire Valley  
and he poured out his sorrows  
with the Cab Franc.

On the day that she admitted having no appetite  
we tasted cheese from Spain,  
made from “all three milks”  
(cow, sheep, goat),  
along with Oregon filberts,  
four kinds of Greek olives and  
bread dipped in olive oil  
seasoned with pepper, lemon, and sea salt.

With her husband’s assertions  
that she hadn’t eaten at all for three days,  
her brother lamented that was her body shutting down.  
I gently urged him to dinner, and  
we moved from the wine bar to small plates  
where everything we ordered was  
uncompromisingly spicy.  
As we reflected on her decision  
to abandon chemo-cocktails  
that weren’t working anyway,  
we ordered Dungeness Crab laced with chili oil,  
ramen noodles and beef brisket  
bathed in a soup so spicy it seared our taste buds  
and the only dish kind to the palate  
was deep fried lollipops  
made with the parts of the chicken  
that we don’t usually eat.

“She’s going on a journey that ends in death,”  
her husband of three weeks had  
told her brother.  
And as my husband took solace  
in the knowledge that such is the case for each of us,  
we returned to the wine bar for  
crème brûlée, chocolate mousse, and  
the richest of the Cab Francs  
to assuage our embittered tongues  
and our embattled hearts.

Then we toasted his sister and her life  
and took comfort,  
for though the cancer may devour her organs  
and finally consume her very life force,  
our hearts will never forget  
the flavor of her presence  
the seasoning she gave our lives,  
or the savor of her love for her brother  
and her brother's love for her.

## Only the Living

A tree on the parking strip has died, its  
brown leaves still clinging to its branches.  
It is the autumnal equinox:  
other trees are turning brown,  
orange, yellow, red,  
and losing their leaves.  
But these leaves will stay  
through winter, spring, summer.

It is only living trees  
that shed their leaves.

A child has slipped away from us,  
into another realm.  
A realm filled with light;  
with love  
and peace  
and glory.  
But though she's no longer with us physically,  
she is always in our hearts,  
now and forever.

Wandering through dreamspace,  
I see her sitting in a park,  
enjoying a beer with friends.  
She is wearing a tank top, jeans, sneakers.  
Her hair gleams in the sun;  
Her eyes flash mischievously.  
Her lips are curved into that quirky smile  
that suggests the ribbing  
she might be giving her brother, her cousin, her nephew,  
her dad.

But when I stop to peer more closely,  
she fades from sight,  
melting into the backdrop of trees.

She has gone into that bright realm  
beyond our earthbound reach  
or glimpse.  
I know she is still clad in the quirky smile,  
the flashing eyes,  
the glowing spirit  
of who she was,  
and though we last saw her as the ashes

we sifted into jars,  
she is whole in spirit,  
in love, in joy,  
while we remain behind mourning her,  
missing her,  
loving her.

It is only the living  
who shed tears.