

TO MY LATE AND FORMER HUSBAND

Given to leaning on trees for honest thoughts,
you propped in profile against the beech tree,
face turned from me last time I saw you,
our house in background wedded to the hill,
built for the generations and complete with stocked cellar
and bunk beds to accommodate tornadoes,
but a house recently become some tainted Tudor mushroom
souring the mouth to make us sick if we stayed.
Leaning that way I could see your deep blue eyes
already on their way to Buffalo.

We made light talk that last day in Abbott and Costello
suits, hands jittering at thighs,
tiptoed around issues full-blown to fissures, freight trains
going nowhere.

We never got it right.

Useless to talk, said the French spy.

I read you died in Lake City last May, probably from a lifetime
of too many steaks, and the news caused a flashback,
nothing large, just a slim moment one early April
when we danced the night away and finally home in our den
you undressed me in such haste you stuffed my underwear
behind a couch where the maid found it next day
while vacuuming, retrieved it, and laid it on the cedar
sideboard for the children to ask *Whose is THAT?*
She declared it hers, laying claim by unspoken pact
to anything found under movable furniture,
an obsession about all things in their place
and the lessons to be learned if they weren't.

Well, you know.

She thought she was in control.

I swear I heard your voice last week,
Pull me from the ground.

KING DAD

As solace for my little brother Arthur
(I call him *Toothpaste*) I've brought him to Granny's
for a late-day walk. *Arthur, where are you?*

I'm o.k. from Arthur,
this again and again, it's his idea, makes him feel secure
as he darts in and out of Central Park bushes
along our path.

Granny reads to us about King Djoser
who ordered two step pyramids built at Saqqara
one thousand years before Moses. Took 10,000
men to build the world's first stone sepulchre
and bury Djoser along with twenty living servants
as companions on his journey to the Afterlife

*(Send out Your light and Your truth,
let them lead me).*

Arthur thinks Djoser needs instructions to the Afterlife
and pens this: "Ride the crocodile down river
to a barge lit by Chinese lanterns
with 26 musclemen and a harp.

They sing in unison, *Follow me,
follow me to your beginnings toward the center of Orion's belt*".

It seems an incredibly long journey, sighs Arthur
and suddenly we're all holding each other,
remembering we'll never again see the freckle
on Dad's right knee, crying for people
leaping through windows, clothes afire,
praying for the pilot of the steel death machine,
praying for the shattered wristwatch on the sidewalk,
hands at 9:30, weeping for all who sleep in cornfields
or in the lap of woods, weary from wandering.

I miss my Dad, says Arthur

We eat double-chocolate brownies on a quilt
as light recedes to reveal a billion stars, revenant and present all along.

**AND IN THE GARDEN SHED
UNDER RUSTING RAKES AND TROWELS,**

**the mute child found a shoebox filled with mildewed
morning glory seeds and his mother's ring of hand-forged
keys all clanking together when he shook the box to set
the spiders spinning, knowing one key opened
that third- floor turret room, all windows,
views to three sides, sealed off now
the room where his mother
uncovered tiny
Modrid
and Gawain
in tarnished armour
behind loose bricks in a niche
one snowy afternoon long time ago;
and he listened to the fine clarity the keys
made inside the shoebox, trusted its mustiness
without knowing why, likened it to bells on snow-wet air
in wintertime before perception, proclaiming some high holy day**

and he remembered the color of his mother's eyes

**MORNING WALK WITH THE DOG
THROUGH A CEMETERY IN CLARENDON COUNTY,
WHERE WE TOOK STOCK**

Each morning Megan and I visit the dead.
I mean, it is quiet here.

We've made friends:

*Good day, Verona T. McHam,
(alive only one day, November 30, 1938
'One Little Bud to Bloom in Heaven').*

Augustus Gilliam lies without strife
among his five wives,
one with the unlikely name of *Fester*.

I remember a dirt road on Edisto Island
leading to what had been a manor house,
No Trespassing everywhere and to the side
the family cemetery where we found Indigo, age 19,
and her twin infants, Ariel and Gabriel,
all dead July 7, 1807, '*Buried with faithful tenderness
by her loving father, Robert Mears McClintock, This
8 July, 1807 A.D.*'

*You, I say to myself, Yes, you!
The years rock by, it's time to take stock.
Confess the nadirs of your experience,
the murders you've committed.*

Thousands of ants and flies, 97 Brown Recluse spiders.

I killed a Luna moth once, it made one helluva mess,
iridescent scales across the screen for weeks.

I had to buy a broom.

I murdered myself when I let you go.
Stretched beyond belief, Megan and I walked
for weeks and wandered. The weather was O.K.
as long as we had a rock to hide beneath.
Under my shoe the spider's underside
resembles a flattened black pearl.
Her legs curl.

GREEN

When cousin Bill was struck in the eye with a stick
pulled from his mother's gardenia bush,
the only green thing in her Gaston County red clay yard,
hell-bent on escaping the whuppin he knew would follow,
he hid under the house with his daddy's pack of hounds
and laid low for three days, eating scraps
thrown to the dogs by his mother, distraught
over her missing boy,

while the eye festered, then died.

He wore a black patch the rest of his life
and long after the violin scholarship at Juilliard,
long after the years as first chair
with the North Carolina Symphony,
he drove a dusty Buncombe County road
to my mother's nursing home a week before her death,
picked up his bow, pressed his face into the old
rosewood violin in a way not to disturb the patch,

and music leapt from that damn fiddle
like some dervish loosed
after two hundred years, whirl and tumble,
climb, implode, then up again in pulsing spirals:
Abide With Me and *Skip to My Lou*,
Black Is the Color of My True Love's Hair,
Mozart. He played Mendelssohn,
although she slept through it all.

He left Mother his credit card on a bedside table
which forever struck me as odd
since she froze into fetal position a year before.

Law, that man could make green seeds bloom,
a nurse said,
any green seed