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.

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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.

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In Memoriam/Day of the Dead

To Anne, 1956 - 1994

Once imminent	Acercandose
death gave you	la muerte te regaló
the bluest eyes,	los ojos más azules,
a gaze so clear	una mirada tan lucida
it cut	que cortaba
to another horizon.	hacia otro horizonte.
¡Espantosa!	Frightening!
La mirada de un alma	The gaze of a soul
despegándose ya de nuestro camino.	ready to begin our next journey.
¡Espantoso!	Haunting!
Mirar a un alma ya quitada	To look at a soul bared
de su disfrace cotidiano.	of the routines of daily life.
Shall I wrestle with you now?	¿Y ahora con que me pongo a la lucha?
Shall I light a candle	¿Te mantendre cerca
on All Soul's	encendiendo una vela
to keep you close?	en el día de los muertos?
No, este espanto lo adoro.	No, I shall cherish this haunting.
Ya se que lo buscaré	I shall seek it out
cuando me empiece a atragar	when forgetting begins
el olvido.	to swallow me.
Yes, I cherish this haunting.	Si, este espanto lo adoro.
I turn to San Gabriel's Peak	Me volteo hacia la cumbre de San Gabriel
tanto tiempo que pasaste bajo su sombra	you spent so much time in its shadow
to hear you dancing	para seguir tu baile
across	cruzando
the brown ridges	las lomas castañas
flowing into the sky	que corren hacia el cielo
northeast of the city of angels.	al noreste de la ciudad de los angeles.