

## **ON THE CUSP OF RECALL**

"The half-life of love is forever."

—Junot Diaz, *This Is How You Lose Her*

The night you put me on notice was a hot August one, the day before your eldest son's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday – do you remember this as clearly, as do I?

Whenever August nights are hot and sticky as scones with butter and jam, and the skies grow so black they have glimmers of seaweed-green running through them—the colour that threatens storms that can portend tornadoes—I remember that night and can hear you screaming. Odd that, as all your threats and final words were in writing – you never spoke, never shouted, nor screamed –all of that is me imagining your voice from other times, times I had forgotten entirely until now.

It wasn't as if your sister, you, and I didn't have some crazy fights—especially when you two were growing up—and they got wicked loud— But we always made up and came together—especially you and your sister, and you and your Dad. It was you who couldn't stand for anyone to be mad. And you, who would be the first to apologize and make up. That's why this prolonged silence, especially without any explanation, and no hope of reconciliation (your words) is so bewildering and hurtful

Another Christmas looms, and of course, I find myself thinking of you, my love, and your boys – our grandsons.

I can't help wondering, as I often do, what you told them about our abrupt absence from their lives? We, who love them fiercely and saw them often were suddenly just not there – heartbreaking for us, confusing for them.

I was stopped at a green light the other day, waiting for a funeral procession to pass And found myself thinking that I was glad we still observe this courtesy The police tasked with blocking the intersections so the cortege could stay together, stood outside their cars, and removed their hats in a sign of respect. It occurred to me that perhaps you've told your boys that we're dead, and that's why they don't see us anymore.

*On the Cusp of Recall*

Or maybe they were content with hearing we've moved away?  
We haven't, but it would likely do as an excuse.  
I thought after enough time passed, I might not still feel a  
physical pain when I think about this estrangement.  
I was wrong  
When you first kicked us out of your lives—I remember  
it felt like half my family had been ripped away as surely  
as if they'd been in a car accident.  
I didn't express this feeling ever because it seemed outrageous  
– I knew you and your kids (and your husband, who I've grown to  
distrust, as I believe he's a large part of this) still breathed.  
To treat my loss as if you were dead seemed a bit over the top.

As time wears on and nothing changes– in fact, any  
overtures I make to try and reach you are so firmly rebutted,  
(including legally, as it turns out),  
I begin to feel ill – both physically and emotionally – my mental health  
starts to deteriorate also, and my anger grows; you *know*, one of the  
things that triggers my depressions is a fear of abandonment (long  
stories, but you *do* know them)  
I wonder if you are so self-absorbed with whatever it is you think  
we have done that warrants being cut out of your life forever,  
it doesn't occur to you that your excising us from your lives might  
also send me spiralling into a deep depression?  
It's not like you weren't aware of this possibility – it happened  
more than once when you were growing up.

Five years on, and still no word from you. Half a decade.  
It occurs to me if we bump into the boys somewhere, we won't know them  
nor they us  
I worry all the time about how they are, how you are.  
Should I send the police to do a wellness check on you?  
Or am I just fooling myself? Trying to believe that you must be ill  
or surely you would have been in touch by now –  
your father and I are getting old. Do you realize that?  
We'll be dead, and there will be no resolving this.  
Is that going to be okay with you? I don't believe it. I don't.

The wind has picked up, and there's a blizzard  
blowing outside the window  
Visibility is nil which suits me as I write  
about our situation – as always,  
I can't see clearly about any of it –  
still, I wish only the best for you. Truly.

*On the Cusp of Recall*

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**HEAVY DUTY MOURNING—IN ADVANCE**

“Poetry – it hears the whispers of elephants.”

—Ferlinghetti, *Poetry As Insurgent Art*

I knew I would be a heavy-duty mourner,  
one unable to let go of those I love easily.  
But I didn't realize that some of that grief  
would manifest itself for people who  
still breathe.  
Ones whose choice to leave me while we  
both still walk the earth  
has cut me more deeply than any other loss I  
can recall.  
Especially as I don't understand her need  
to tear the fabric of our love  
without explaining the rendering nor  
the suddenness of the same.  
Just one day, ripping herself and her family,  
my grandsons, clean away.  
As if they had never been a part of us, as  
if she hadn't, either.

Does it have anything to do with the man in  
her life—our son-in-law?  
A man we thought we knew well that we  
loved too, or at least I thought we did.  
But now, I wonder—if he was faking his  
affection and respect for us the whole time—  
maybe we were doing the same?  
Everything becomes suspect, once something  
like this occurs  
and nothing remains the same. I don't trust  
any of my original suppositions,  
can't take certainties for granted anymore.  
and it becomes a sad way to live.

## **IT'S NOT ALL THAT UNCOMMON**

"Poetry: It is made with the syllables of dreams."  
Ferlinghetti – *Poetry As Insurgent Art*

This estrangement thing, this being banned from seeing your child and your grandchildren, by said child.

I've just recently learned via my other child, who learned it from her psychologist, that it's a more commonplace happenstance than one might think.

I assumed that meant the situation might be easily remedied; I mean, if estrangement happens with such startling regularity—perhaps those who deal with such things have learned some devices, perfected some advices, you know?

Daughter number two, the younger, understood also that it would be a bad idea to do anything to exacerbate the situation.

The psychologist 's further suggestion; continue to act as if everything was alright, keep buying presents and cards.

Perhaps even write her sister a letter to say how wrong she feels this separation is and how she wants her to know that her door is always open, she will always be there, loving her, whenever she's prepared to accept her back into her life.

This last bit goes against the grain of anything the daughter who received the counsel would normally even give a thought, let alone hear. But with a voice laced with tears, regret, and not a small part acceptance, I saw that she realized the verity of this solution.

And I saw it too; there is nothing to be gained by trying to figure out what is wrong with the estranged one—that had been our original intention—and no doubt—that would likely drive her further away.

However, we *do* love her; we need her to know *that* above all else, and we want the boys (grandsons/nephews) to know that too. My heart cracks apart every time I even consider those little boys.

## **IT'S NOT ALL THAT UNCOMMON**

But I must admit, as time grows longer since I've  
seen my daughter, as recalcitrant as I find  
her behaviour, my heart aches for her as well.  
For the girl, the woman, she used to be.  
To where has that person disappeared?  
Is she gone forever?  
Does she think we are as awful as she seems  
to believe we are.  
What, if anything, can we do to change her mind?  
My tears know no end.

## **COULD SHE BUT CARE LESS**

"Poetry is all that is worth remembering in life."

*William Hazlitt*

Under the shelter of a starless night,  
she risks taking it down, remembers  
to be careful. Last time, she had  
been hasty, and pieces of her life

escaped the folio and were  
gone in a beat. She spreads  
her hand lightly on the page,  
and raises her eyes to peer at it;

feels her heartbeat quicken  
at the eyes that meet hers.  
She knows logically, the  
baby's eyes aren't really

gazing into hers, but her  
heart aches so, she can't  
convince it otherwise.  
Afraid to turn the page, she

sits unmoving, stroking the photo,  
remembering the last time  
she'd seen the babe—how knowing,  
his solemn expression. She ponders

if she'll see him again, feels worries  
grouping like a conspiracy of ravens,  
wonders if closing the book will feel  
as careless as opening it did.

## **I WAIT**

"I waited on the balcony, utterly miserable  
as if yesterday had arrived with the ivies of childhood  
for the earth to extend its wings over my vacated earth."

*from Winter Garden by Pablo Neruda*

I wait on your porch in utter despair  
as if the time of reckoning has passed and with it,  
the vines of your memories entangled themselves  
with those of my own.

If only your leave-taking were as simple as meshing  
our collective memories.  
I'd know why you chose to go.  
You'd know how big the hole in my heart has grown.

Five years plus since you messaged me your edict:  
a rambling, garbled missive—I have it still—filled  
with vitriol and vague accusations, banning us  
from seeing or talking to you or yours—ever again.

Yours? Most notably, our three grandsons;  
beloved, engaging, bright—all under age five—  
Your ban took effect the day before the eldest's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday.  
"You are uninvited to his party—"

Why do I wait on your porch, growing more disconsolate by the second?  
I'd heard through a mutual friend—the only way I learned anything now—  
that the boys were at camp, your husband away on a business trip.  
I wanted to seize the chance to make sure that *you* were okay.

I ring your doorbell and stand on your porch, waiting.  
I can hear piano-playing—starting and stopping—*you* practising.  
Thinking you haven't heard me—I ring your bell again.  
I listen as the music stops, and I take a breath—then wait, wait, wait.

Albinoni's Adagio resumes.