

Title: Looking in from the Outside

Death by Cigarettes

Buried my husband today
a really fine man

The obituary reads—
after a long battle with lung cancer
but that's a misnomer
the fight was over soon after it began
oh we would rally the troops now and then
motivation, determination, resolutions
but they would falter

beat down by enemy forces
addiction, temptation, stress
slowly, deliberately,
each lily-white cylinder found its way in
he practically held the gun
now it's just me left with anger and despair
haunted that I held my tongue

I'm nothing more than an accomplice
gathering spent casings
in the yard

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Travel Plans

As we traverse the mountains of Peru
our fingers lightly touching one another's,
I know this is our destiny—this life of life
adventure, exploration, passion—
at the Nile River, we skim the edges
knowing in our hearts, its history,
each call of the wild, each rainfall—
the time we traced the Oregon Trail
from end to end, it seemed an eternity

There are times I think of leaving you,
closing the door behind me forever
once or twice, I've reached the threshold
suitcase in hand—resolute, determined
before the waiver that always follows

I know what stops me, not your pleas,
not responsibilities, certainly not guilt
but that haunting, memory-packed map
four by eight glossy of the entire world,
worn bare in the spots where our fingers
have journeyed, and our minds dreamed,
and my heart reconsiders—even knowing
we'll never venture past that solid oak frame

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Poetry, the Rules

I want to write of love
I want to record sadness—preserve it, and yet,
drain it from my heart so I can move on

I want to write of goodness
the child who smiles—the creature saved
so I can read them later and be filled

I want to sing the praises
of the underdog who perseveres despite
fate allotted him—I want to cheer

I don't want to dwell on periods and commas
I want pauses to come from my heart
not the ink

I want the breaks
I dwell on to be internal—cutting to the soul,
not from the keyboard on which I type

But one without the other brings chaos,
what good are my words
without structure and guidance?

This dance has rules along with the freedom
and there's poetry in learning to follow
as well as lead

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Critique

Forget what I said—there, I've said it
those words that I told you to abolish,
put them back, bold them if you want
who am I, the reader, to pass judgment?
Did I journey into your darkest recesses
rummage through your heart's chambers
gathering thoughts and pieces of yourself?

Was I with you when your father died,
when your only brother was lost to war,
and when your world shattered—
the slivers, taking years to gather
was I there to help hold them together?
No, but your words were, black and white,
the deep solace of their consistency

How easy it is for me, to sit comfortably here
and decide, what you should have done
you, having the strength to show the world
your heart on a page, to encourage others
to do the same, and I with my crimson pen,
asking you to eliminate a piece of yourself
as if it were simply a word