

Marriage

Not the lintel made of timber,
brick, or steel spanning
two vertical supports
of equal character and temper
like an architectural ornament,
to take safe cover under.

More, the semicircular arch,
made of stones chiseled to fit
beside each other, broad-shouldered,
compressing and distributing
weight down and to the sides,
through which our triumphs march.

Two Photos (1951, 2010)

All of us face the firing camera
as if nothing mattered; only smiles did.
I was barely two, and the three of you,
in pigtails and bangs and party dresses,
could boast of six and nine and almost twelve.
Poor baby brother, I was the spoiled kid.

To reach the other photo, each had to cross
a crevasse, a chasm, a grand canyon
of sixty years. In formal dress, two clasp
wine glasses, all link arms to celebrate,
with white hair, a beard, three colored hairstyles,
surviving divorces, children, careers—
yet mostly time, that promised nothing back when
nothing mattered. But no one knew that then.

The Price of Getting Old

First, the cost of blood work
and biopsies to analyze
the contents and properties
of your state of ill- or well-being.

The cost of prescription drugs
to regulate your bodily functions
after your deductible or Medicare-
allowable discount or amount.

The cost of physical therapy
to improve the limited motion
of your muscles and limbs
that could feign such chronic pain.

The cost of X-rays, CAT scans, and MRIs
to determine the sources
and extents of your conditions
for a clearer diagnosis and prognosis.

The cost of open surgery
to remove what's not needed,
what part can be replaced,
what went terribly wrong for so long.

The cost of DME (durable
medical equipment), the cane,
the walker, the wheelchair
where you ultimately commit to sit,

tallying up the hospital bills,
the specialists' invoices,
plan premiums and scheduled payment fees,
swallowing all those pills—

asking how can you now afford it.

The Hugging Post

The hugging post is roughly five feet ten
and weighs about 170 pounds.
It is fairly straight and firm
and comes fully assembled—with two arms
that, once engaged, may never let you go,
and a resting place (or two) for your head.
It's been broken in for your benefit,
and comes with a fool-proof guarantee.

But you can customize its strength.
Frequent use has been associated
with improved health and longer life.
While it costs nothing to operate,
it does become habit forming,
and may lead to stronger addictions.
So far, the Surgeon General
has not required a warning label.

If you're not convinced, put it to a test.
In a minute, if it fails to fulfill
your expectations, you may be trying
too hard. Close your eyes and keep still.
Gradually, your heart will come to rest.
At that moment, you'll feel yourself flying.

There. That wasn't so bad.
You can let go now.

Key Notes (AKA Opus Olivetti)

Assembled in ascending rows, the choir
awaits directions from its master's hands.
Keyed up, the members barely need a cue
to set them leaping from their seats to chant,
successively, their *a capella* parts—
to rise and sit again, when called upon,
though sometimes out of turn, according to
a movement that is never quite the same.
And so, in bits and spurts, the lyrics grow;
lento, prestissimo, the rhythm runs.
(Each bar is measured with a tinkling bell.)
The letters sing without knowing the words.