

Roberto and the Snow Globe

Dedicated to Margaret Atwood, Poet

This world you took
away with you,

so small it fit in
the callused

palm of your hand
not unlike this

snow globe, where you in
white relief survive.

Here trees crawl like spiders
to catch the wind,

snow perplexes
a blue sky,

while branches shake from
the weight of it.

Only the ground
hints of substance,

you more like outcropping of
rock.

Blind to this hardening, snow
shapes you.

Soon only snow will be visible,
our love shaken apart.

Not You, Mother

I still can't figure out your
love of quacks.

They sold you on magic
potions, mysterious, medical

devices, the weirded out,
odd treatment --

in essence, cure-alls
for your sick child. Did you

give up on orthodox, medical
treatment? Were you unhappy

in the time it took for me
to recover from pneumonia,

and its many relapses? How
could you tolerate

the pain of electro-shock
when I couldn't. Daily enemas

with arcane potions bled me out.
What about the magical

x-ray machine used to heal
my scarred lungs? Not your pain,

discomfort, but Mine. Remember that
last trip to Mt. Sinai

Hospital. Blood poured out my
mouth, lips blue, underweight

by thirty pounds. I lived
in spite of you.

Mama Sing-Song

“Mama,” says the
magic skin doll,
drinks her bottle and
wets her diaper.

“Mama,” says her
little girl, only
silence follows,
her blanket
dragging on the
floor.

Mama, Mama the
thunder scares me,
hold me tight until
the lights come on -
only silence.

Mama where are you hiding
the bed is empty? I am
alone and shaking. *Mama*
is this some game to teach
me to be braver... hide and
seek? Where are you, the
house is dark and hollow.

Mama what kind of lesson
is this... how to master
fear, so alone, so afraid?

Mama I hear your laughter
high up in the rafters
floating on dusty motes.

Mama, Mama, my baby
doll needs you to hug her
until she stops crying.

Did You Ever

Did you ever view old photo prints
colors faded to sepia and listen
to my three spinster aunts share
their tangled stories?

Oh yes, the same ones who gifted
me with orange juice-stained pillow
cases at my bridal shower.

Old age taunts their memories,
somehow truth diminished in
the telling of events, all these
prints just reams of paper to
a recycled backstory, so
many secrets.

The camera feeds on skeins of truth/lies, still
life, happening moment to moment,
questionable tales missed or embellished by
Kodak prints.

Life gone wrong, prints - cracked lines
deface a breviary of timeless regrets and
bleak story lines from the past.

So many questions and answers
hidden from view

did you ever -

want to murder your husband, the driver
cry acid tears for your dead daughter
try to cherish the surviving son hire a
mechanic to find fault but
discover a car in perfect running order

instead a careless accident lighting a joint
more important than safety of two kids, ours,
in the backseat.

Civil Rights 1958

My Sister, Susan, broke the color line.
You know, acquaintances in school, but don't
socialize at parties, don't date, don't boyfriend
Negros.

Her popularity burned her like
lye, scars weeping. No more,
never Color Guard again, flags
barely flying.

Why the label-- *rebel*,
outsider? Twelve years of
schooling together, changed
overnight with one party, graduation

celebration with friends both black and
white, balloons, paper streamers, different
colors, those skin tones rocking out the
night,

raucous joy, Nat King Cole, B.B.
King and Motown

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At midnight coloreds still went home
across the railroad tracks driving oh
so slow to avoid police detection.