

Talking
to the
Night

Susan Meehan

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DEDICATED TO

This book is dedicated to the memory of two young people from the DC area who recently suffered unexpected and violent deaths, one at the hands of public authority.

Two young men with whom I have had some level of personal connection were recently killed. It is always a real shock when someone with whom one has such connections dies at the hands of others so young and tragically. These young men had every right to expect to live happily and peacefully for many years to come. But instead, they were ripped away by violence, and to make it worse, one of those deaths was by the hands of misused public authority.

Their loss becomes ours, and brings out the realization that we all are vulnerable, and that thoughtfully-assigned public assistance needs to be put in place and skillfully-used on a long-term and hopefully permanent basis if we are ever to change the underlying reasons for our high murder rates. I pray that our government will show increased devotion to a path of mercy, so that we might as a population regain a way of life as beautiful, peaceful and blessed as the lives of those two young people, lost too soon.

SATURDAY MORNING LESSON

TWO CARS HEADED towards each other
down our narrow city alley,
our minivan filled with our young children,
the other, with two middle-aged women in the front,
a stately golden Cadillac, the golden brougham
of a local schoolteacher.

When the two cars reached impasse
and could go no further, we stopped.
The two ladies briskly debarked,
one on either side of that glorious car.
Silently and knowingly, as in a dream,
each squatted,
pulled her pants down
and simultaneously let out
a long, streaming geyser of golden piss.

The pissing finished,
the teachers pulled themselves erect,
carefully adjusted their clothes
and expertly backed the golden Cadillac
down our newly-watered alley,
and disappeared.

Our young children gaped and stared through the
windshield,
awestruck at what adults had leave to do,
and grinned, anticipating great freedom very soon.

LEAVINGS

And I think where did he ever learn about cars
and how did he learn to touch the heart of women
and where is he going now
and where will his journey end?
I guess that it will not.

And I think about leavings,
hurried under summer suns
slowly into winter nights
and when will they end
and how can I take the pain?

And now the pain has come again
as he goes out our door one very last time
away from home forever this very first time
and calls goodbye, waving happily,
fading quickly out of sight.

And I wonder,
is this my exchange?
is this my new child?
And so I hold the pain close to me
and make it dear
knowing it will be staying,
still with me
close to me
after he is long gone,
long gone
gone.

TO REMEMBER

I WISH MYSELF perfect again,
not forgetting names and places
that are extraordinary only in that
I can no longer count
on remembering them upon cue –
nor dropping my socks and
losing my sense of space,
all turned around.

My directions were always
sequential and coherent.
Now I write long notes
to remind myself of things
I need to do,
but forget and leave them
under the bed,
scrunched and ignored.

AS WE ARE ELDERING

As I LIE in the crook of his arm,
I wonder what I will remember the most
if Death were to take him first.

Would it be hidden laughter, eye-signed,
across a crowded room,
the surprising silk of male flesh,
the warmth of fingers gripping mine in the cold,
our talking for hours in the early morning,
the steady reach of a protective arm,
the many courtesies of a gallant man?

We anticipate cruelly our fear of separation,
knowing it will come too soon,
an unbearable parting of one into twain,
our complementarity like both sides of one hand -
inseparable in function,
inseparable in love.

FOREVER TURNING PAGES

WE VISITED OLD friends last night
as they sorted out their library
before they sold their home,
a lifetime of books
piled high against the evening windowpanes,
stacked along the couches,
over doors, under chairs,
near enough to be caressed one more time.

The room was sweetly scented
by old paper
soft leather
fine ideas no longer common.

Once read and reread with passion and respect
the books were now being given away
packed off in uncertain voyage
their final destiny -
perhaps the city's trash bin or
the town dump,
dismissed
by a cold, untutored eye.

As love and memories passed
between their hands
in volumes
that spoke of times long gone
and places to be revisited only in the mind
I longed for time to stand quite still
for dust motes to stay settled in the air
for books to wait half-opened,
and bliss to outwit age.

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