

Dion Farquhar

Extremes

I wasn't there to see it
but in a way, neither were you
living out your last years
indifferent to counsel about self-care

how pious we must have sounded
gerontology case manager
stretching, nutrition
assisted living

all of it requiring
coordination of care
consistency
bourgeois virtue

unlike *beauty*
to which you conformed
while eviscerating it

you never got on board
with medicalization
 some feeble gestures
 at compliance
you wanted none of it
just pure, passive self-destruct
 the abstracted indifference
 of a philosopher
an ER you could dip into
and walk away from
you wrote about it—
 the mystery of agency
 the damage and debt
but enmeshed, trapped
tacitly subjected
to those you supported

What would they do without me?
control claimed *and* ceded
 buffeted
 in free fall
 all the way down

Long After

Forty-five years of friendship

affinities galore

we had no idea

what were we doing

like siblings stuck together

despite a twelve-year gap

a touch of mother-daughter

cool professional

lunatic-fringe daughter

dynamic inevitable

though role reversal the last decade

Only the ferocity of family

could hold on, hold out

year by year, so long

after everything was lost, dead

necro-fantasy

the less there was

the more vehement I got

we were a mini-version

of what you'd done

that I'd spent half my life doing

with your men:

attached yourself to bad objects

you empathized with and tried to fix
as I attached myself to you
lining up to the dominoes of fix-it
the same patter:
non-reciprocal relationships
distracted by geography,
the highs and lows
after the wall went up:

Sal never touched me. That's crazy talk.

I stayed away, never again
made the effort to visit
but kept it going by phone
kicking the corpse
myself

Forced Quit

I couldn't bear to visit
you—helpless, passive, resigned
the last five years
when you couldn't leave “your men”
or became too frail to travel
 though what we said was
 “never the right time”
 either you in Kankakee
 Sal in one of his rages
 or my work schedule

but the real reason *was*
you didn't want any more
intrusive advice
 stay hydrated, eat better
 you've got to move
 get help with the Cottage

and I couldn't countenance
what you'd become
or see the Cottage so trashed
 Sal sold it as a “tear-down”
 after your death

I couldn't stop
my meliorist rant
or keep from playing

social worker, cleaner, cook, organizer

Stuck with who we were—
you unable to staunch the decline
me unable to quit trying to fix you
so we kept on

til Sal pulled the plug on the phone
then there was no more talk
you whispering into a phone
you were too weak to hold
from your hospital bed
no deathbed visit from me
just this poem