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Slow in Translation

After an Eight Year Loss, to Alzheimer's

“... the dark, too, blooms and sings.”
—Wendell Berry (year?)

You wake to what oddly seems a fertile soil
of darkness, the past aching decade like lunar ground.
Dreams have had you living vividly
some other truth.
Before an open window—you find moonlight's
cool anointing almost painful,
reminding of what might be left to lose.

After so long a silence, all that's unspoken
seems immense, like the coming
green heaviness of summer.

Now, in this darkness, you imagine
wide acres stretching, growing all the absences
from past life to this, and again that perception
of what memory can weigh.
With staccato cries of night birds,
all your failures begin to feel ... tattered.
You sense spring leaves shudder in the yard.
Vagrant memory pokes for somewhere else to go.

Like grace notes: *four chimes*
from the mantle clock in the next room.
Perhaps the hour is near
for turning once more

to the solace of Wyeth, the exquisite
translations of Schubert and Seurat,
or to Berry, and a long, simple view

of black and white cattle
bowing their heads
over new greening pasture.

Winter at Last

After Long Decline, a Death in April

The summer greens, then fall-leaf brightness,
added only heaviness, so at last you choose
a welcome way—the winter forest.

No bickering of birds or green leaves
murmuring hearsay, no coyotes exerting answers,

you walk out—only footfall sounding
with faint pulse in your ears.
You taste the metallic cold of the season
this far north, welcome the frost biting you back.

You sense the wilderness knowing more
than you can ever say, try to enter
the kind of silence that can be consolation.
Streams are slowed to ice for winter.
Gothic arms of corkscrew pines reach toward you
among empty aspen, their black and white trunks
a beauty unremarked.

You don't want to talk for weeks,
even to yourself—too much that can't be named.
A life habit of writing things down, that sometime
solace of words, vanished months back.

But frozen landscape—a kind of pain relief—
stays reliable, its closed coldness
open to certain refugees.
And your breath ... your breath ...
it still blooms upward
like the fragment of a prayer.

Learning to Live Alone

At High Elevations

After a near half century, returning
is like entering rooms you once
called your own, but had forgotten.
Too early autumn, the leaves knowing
better than you how to let go. The sun
a thin, white wafer, not the bronze gong
of years lived in shrub-steppe not far above sea.
Then, winter's silver flute of moonlight
over new snow, generating the hope
of riding out any weather, even loneliness.

After a week's cold comes a night of sleet
pulsing in wind, beating back time,
and memory returns to partings that left you
bereft: that first love, dark-haired and gentle,
moved elsewhere; long winter following.
Your father's enduring care of the place he was born,
then short-season fields growing his absence.
One by one the children gone, distances
too far. And blackly bewildering,

your spouse displaced through years
by the slow scythe of Alzheimer's.

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Some nights, there is no defining
your moods: an unease of sleeping
or of waking? Fear of all that is beyond
any words you can form?
The unanswered hangs like a scent ...
metallic air below zero.

Yet remembrance of what to love
about high winters comes back: frost
re-forming when wiped away on cold glass;
your father's whistling through his teeth
as his breath bloomed upward in the icy air.
The early darkness, more accommodating
than long summer light.

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There are all those endings that begin before
we can know—so much streaming in the senses,
so much moving on to the next thing,
we lose the moments departure begins.

Maybe if we could choose some other life,
we would still choose our own,
however harrowing the leavings or returns,
the recurrent nights needing it all to come clear,
to be worth all displacements,
to at last emerge from some chill secrecy
into clarity at last.

About the Poet

Dixie Partridge's work appears widely in anthologies and journals. Her first book, *Deer in the Haystacks*, is part of the book series Poetry of the West, Ahsahta Press. Her second, *Watermark*, won the U.S. national Eileen Barnes award. Email: pearantree@gmail.com