

New Digs

A gray-haired man
plays Gilbert & Sullivan
as Ernie and I stand in line
to be handed
a small plastic glass of
sauvignon blanc
a paper plate for
shrimp, cheese, crackers.
Soon joining a table of several women
we don't know,
each wearing a name tag,
we're greeted warmly.
The pianist shifts to Gershwin as we
talk about where we all lived
before we moved here.

My neighbour Polly tends to mother me.
I feel like one of her seven children
nine grandchildren
as she makes sure I meet
my neighbors
learn more about
events, the Friday movie,
finds me partners for bridge.

After dinner, Ernie and I enter the elevator.
As the doors start to close,
he leans over, about to kiss me
as 90-year-old Arlene squeezes in,
sees us and looks embarrassed.
Ernie stands straight, quiet.
I can only think to say,
"It's the day after Valentine's Day."

I think of our old house, now sold,
empty, waiting to be torn down,
I think of my old neighborhood
filled with young families we don't know.

On a table in the lobby, again
a bud vase with a single rose
a photo
a card with dates.

This time it's Joanie Grayson.
Just a week ago, we talked about concerts,
her love of Beethoven.

So many people with walkers and canes here.

And yet, last night, something Naomi said at dinner—
I laughed harder than I'd laughed in years.

Revenge

Wisteria climbs
our old sycamore,
encircles its branches,
dangles amethyst earrings,
purple candelabra.
At the base of the tree,
I hack at the vine's thick ropes.

See how Virginia creeper
chokes our garden,
its dark green counterpane,
its underground snakes
cling to the rain-soaked earth
as I tug to free
the once-flowering myrtle.

Now hot fingers of red
circle my neck
climb my face,
pink poison ivy pearls
blanket my arms, my hands
as amethyst and green
glisten outside my window.

Ernie

“Let me explain how an MRI works,”
he says, sitting at the kitchen table
as I talk about my claustrophobia...

“Matter is composed of atoms,” he begins,
looking patient
drawing diagrams as he describes
electrons, protons,
a nucleus, “...billionth of a centimeter,
contains neutrons...”

I try to relax, try to forget about feeling trapped in
a narrow tube while enduring thundering
thumps and clangs I’m told go on and on...

“...each neutron contains a magnetic dipole...north,
south, randomly oriented...
But a strong magnetic field aligns them,”

I force myself to focus.

Focus.

“perturbs the dipoles with an alternating field
causes them to vibrate, emit radio waves...
picked up and these signals are transformed into an image....”

I think of dipoles lining up, vibrating in a magnetic field.
Could that be a metaphor for the two of us?
“You see? I don’t understand your fear.”

But when the time comes, he sits next to the machine,
holds my outstretched hand for the full clanging hour.