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Poetry: Counting in Circles; All Would Be Still

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Counting in Circles
(Eighth Anniversary)

I remove 4 red roses from the dozen, don’t want to discard them, although they’re already dying. For the 8th year, his parents and brothers pull up in two cars at Swan Point and we meet in the garden.

For the 8th time, his mother wonders if he hears us and I tell them how my grandmother always said she still talked to my grandfather, how I’d tell her that’s natural and she’d say but he talks back.

For the 7th time, we joke about putting the dog’s ashes in beside his and would there still be room for me. For the 8th time, she says he’s not here and I say I still feel him in the house and then we get in our cars and drive to the restaurant on the river for her birthday. Today she is 90. Her son was 58. In 7 years I will become older than him, just as I outgrew my mother at 41.

For the 2,920th day, I tell myself stories about us. Once upon a very finite time in a very particular place. But then there’s quantum physics. Once my husband grabbed me as I stepped off the curb and I saw myself split off, get smacked by the passing bus.

If we could choose our date of demise would we? So we knew exactly what we were counting up to, counting down to. Would the dimension of each day expand or contract in relation to what remained?

Scientists spend lifetimes radioing signals into galaxies, listening for thousands-year-old calls. Tonight, I sit in my driveway, watch the stone walls of my 200-year-old cottage shift color in the fading light and think if I’m going to stay I might as well go inside, take off my coat and own it a while.

All Would Be Still

The rhododendrons have hunkered into winter. Thin, intertwined birches reflect perfect twins on the surface of the freshwater inlet. Tall tawny grasses along water’s edge waver so slightly, it’s like watching a lover breathe.

All would be still, but the sparrows—frenetic—flit, dart, dive, alight on slight branches, startle others who burst skyward or drop to the ground. They appear to collide midair, break apart like split atoms. Shrill quarrels pierce the windowed wall through which I watch.

I wish I could paint for you flashes of crimson breast or blue crest but they’re the color of wintered leaves. This is not a still life, and I do not sit on a museum bench. The sky has dulled, unsettled. Pale sunlight peers from beyond the firs. I pull on my coat, slide open the glass door.

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