

Timothy Murphy

Envoi

Steve told his wife "I think Tim's going to die,"
ten years ago last fall,
but answering a call
from the Spirit I staged another try,
a last grasp for the sky,
and so ensued a decade, far my best,
but now I must endure a cruel test

which I shall fail because my fate is sealed.
So here's my gratitude
for ten years' latitude
in which my crippled soul was slowly healed,
my wounds annealed
by mercies far beyond selfish intent.
Let this be my Last Will and Testament.

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The Sentence

Stage IV cancer? Think of it as Cat V,
the wind howling one hundred eighty knots,
raking beloved islands, casting yachts
into the trees, the handful left alive.
This is the final storm that I must weather.
Into a palm trunk drill me like a feather.

After a hurricane islands recover,
approaching once again their earthly heaven.
I'm facing the great change at sixty-seven,
reuniting with Alan, long my lover,
taken from me nearly eight years ago,
leaving me to blizzards and blowing snow,

my last two years infinitely my best,
readying one servant for his long rest.

Return to the Olson Farm

Old AA slogan, "One day at a time,"
foot in front of another plodding on,
grateful each day to glimpse another dawn,
and on my finer days meter and rhyme
conjoin to do what Tim has done before,
to probe deeply capacious memories,
to hunt once more these rows of leafless trees
where an Alberta Clipper comes to roar
and rarely does a circling eagle soar.

Hard to believe this all comes to a close,
but I thought I'd be dead at twenty-five,
and I am amazed, finding me still alive,
the ghost of Feeney weaving through these rows
of ashes where last night's new snow drift blows.

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Hopes for September

Stevie and I have made a plan for fall.
 We shall take little Pat
 sporting his blaze orange hat
to Section Seventeen, and there my tall

Norwegian friend will crush the birds I miss.
 Chucky and little Jet,
 best friends the day they met,
will flush our pheasants in their frenzied bliss.

First I must fix this hip that's killing me.
 Lesions on throat and spine
 must go, and a barbed tine
on Satan's fork must fling one victim free.

*St. Jude, we who are hopeless call on thee.
Patron of lost causes, pray for me.*

The Four H's Again

for Steve Bodio

Last night I dreamed I flew an eagle-owl,
her wing span just six feet,
the talons of her feet
clutching my fist, horned ears above her cowl.

We hunted high, hard scabble Kazakhstan,
my barrel-chested horse
scrambling aloft in force
for wolf, the war bird's muffled glide our plan.

The peaks above still buried deep in snow,
we rode on broken ground,
hunter, hawk, horse and hound
as sheep and goats lay grazing far below.

A wolf flushed far under a *bergshrund's* rift.
Launched, and the stealthy strike was blinding swift.

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Farm Boy

Places I'll never see? The list is long,
beginning with Jerusalem and Rome.
My grounding on the prairie was too strong,
too firmly fastened to our Beardon loam.
This challenging but goodly place to farm
where seven decades I have struggled now,
where long I skated close to grievous harm,
farrowed many a Large White Landrace sow,
rooted me to the windsweep of the Plains,
the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse,
prey to the randomness of patchy rains,
never foreseeing how the balance tips,
a small Antaeus standing on his land
whose gravity I've grown to understand.

Next Year Jerusalem

It is the stabs of pain that wake me up,
my shoulder or right hip.
I take my drugs and slip
a snack of milk bone to my drowsy pup.

Sometimes I pray and just go back to sleep.
More often though I work,
delving the rhymes that lurk
in half-remembered dreams that run so deep.

Take pity on your lowly servant, Lord,
let this cup pass from me.
Though death will cut me free
from pain, my hand is clinging to a cord.

I've not yet sailed the Sea of Galilee
or climbed the cruel hill of Calvary.

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Montane View

At every visit from a loving friend
“How many times will I see him again,”
I ask, “before my end?”
I’ve not been truly close to many men,

too many of those few are long since gone.
Now it becomes my time to follow them,
twig from the great tree sawn,
a sprig of scion wood, a slender stem.

Soon I shall leave behind my wealth, my verse,
sonnets drawn from the Rockies’ snowy slopes
where I climbed to rehearse
my distant death, terminus of my hopes,

the earthly ones. We are immortal too,
and heaven surely dwarfs a montane view.