

Requiem by Marietta Calvanico

An Ink Publications Broadside

Artifacts

I sustained a sanctimonious fiction
about our friendship
in spite of all the breaks
on-and-off over five decades

so many photos
in closed albums
high on a shelf
tell the story of us silently

Artifacts:
from the Latin
Arte- by skill *Factum-* to make
our mutual importance brilliantly co-created

Artifacts:
The turquoise bracelet with the shark’s tooth
An old cast iron skillet
The carved pigs we bought in the S.I. museum gift shop
My black leather jewelry box
The brown sweater you wore, then I wore, then you wore
The little wooden bobble-head
The handblown blue glass I bought for you in Georgetown

Artifacts:
proof of us
Didn’t I treasure each and every thing
that bore witness to our history?

Artifacts:
Sound memory
Smell memory
Touch memory
Things that seem so close, but are too far to reach

Geography: Part I

North Shore babies arrived
at St. Vinny’s or Staten Island Hospital
so we had a 50-50 chance
that our fathers would stand
shoulder to shoulder
peering through glass
without speaking to each other
until seven years later
driving us back and forth
one to the other

The Gemini Twins

We did not sit next to each other
in the second-grade classroom,
Boy-Girl-Boy-Girl interrupted by
Boy
who passed our notes despite the danger
who cried with us when JFK was shot

Party invitations came for you, so they asked me too—
You the bubbly pretty one
You with shiny chestnut hair
You who chose me
to sit in front of your TV
eating our lunch watching *Jeopardy!*

There were no dolls:
there was the excavation for the new highway
there was the swamp, the spring and fat brown punks
there was the park with bridges, horse trails and bugs
when we came home
we reeked of everything in the day

We were told we were smart
and so we were smart,
we went on to study French and dance and painting,
cutting boring high school classes,
we drank terrible coffee at a sticky counter
in a long-gone sweet shop

Men came, jobs came, more men,
babies
always more men for you
men who left you
men who beat you
men who begged you to take them back

We rode the decades
weddings, funerals, drinks after work
coffee on Saturday mornings
we ran for trains and planes
we drank and laughed
we drank and cried
I rescued you when you needed to be rescued
I watched you dive back into the black hole again
every time

Pulling the Trigger

In the earlier years
we thought it was funny
all those Bobbies and Billies
and they just kept coming

You married two of them
(one each)
but after a while
they were all the same person

At least with Bobby #1
you could blame it on ‘nam
So when Billy’s lungs were punctured
why did I pray for a miracle turnaround?

In those last days
his chest rhythmically pumped with air
the doctor reminded you—
You had the power to make it stop

You finally had the power
But even as he lay comatose
he took it back
and died at 1:15 AM

Geography: Part II

For a while during those years we lived
on the South Shore
we took the R train together
and then the ferry
It was a long ride home
on that Staten Island train
stops 16 and 17
and boarding you would ask
odds or evens?
We counted them off
without missing a beat in our banter
I liked to be evens so I could say
16 as I stepped off at my stop
knowing you would say
17 even though
I wouldn’t be there to hear it

The Emergency Room

I wanted to call an ambulance
(and the cops)
but you said you weren't bleeding
very much
so we drove

Even at 2 AM
the ER at St. Vinny's
is buzzing
we sit among
wounded, nauseous, crying and dozing

I watch you fill out the paperwork
in rote mode
but with a slight hesitation
at the last
blank line

One by one
the others are called
I wait with the clumsy woman
who tripped
and fell down the stairs

No one wonders at your story
Not the intake clerk
Not the nurse
Not the doctor
She fell, I said, she fell

Months later I testified for you
and you were protected
but you went back anyway
I guess you didn't bleed
enough

Geography: Part III

A long time ago, the river was yours
I had better conversations with the ocean
The tide pulling out, taking my questions away
Undulating back (be peaceful, be peaceful)

Now, I sit up in bed, and the river says *Good Morning!*
Sometimes sparkling with early sun, sometimes mossy green
Every day on the river is different
I am trying to learn its ways

The river whispers to me:
Say her name or not, it's okay, I've carried it away
You can't step into the same river twice—
There is no trace of her here

This river doesn't call your name—
The current runs strong today
It sings my world
And I celebrate

Requiem

The beach isn't lonely on an autumn afternoon,
Down by the jetty another four-wheeler turns, grinding and kicking up sand,
Bait-diggers with shovels and pails, fishermen wading out knee-deep,
I don't miss the happy noise of past summers when I walked here with you,
This cool salty calm suits me now.

We were ageless together,
Childhood blurred into teen years
and we didn't notice when
we became women,
We never changed for each other.

In the beginning slow, long summers
took you away
road-tripping with your family,
sending me postcards
from dream-like places I had never been.

I am grateful for the innocent memories,
times long before anything tainted us,

joint decisions on future occupations:
actress, WAVE, WAC, writer,
You are here in the last.

Twinned in random timing:
our marriages and motherhood
our divorces and our hardening
alternating moves
until we lost count

The tide pulls out and reveals
a swath of compressed wet sand,
I think of walking here with you,
your dogs running freely
chasing something imaginary up to the water's edge

Here's to:

The redwood deck around your pool
muddy horse trails
punks in the swamp
roosting in the overgrown pussy willow
strange objects in your grandfather's bedroom
Haley Mills and Patty Duke
your mother's eyeliner
long-gone sweet shops
first boyfriends
springtime ducklings in the park
moving boxes
coffee mugs
dogs running on the beach
vodka
the Staten Island Ferry
living room dancing
to-go cups
working late
dollar store finds
Plymouth, Mass
late night bars
all the songs we never need to hear again

and our kids who, thank God, never found each other attractive

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Marietta Calvanico has lived a rich and varied life. She built a career in advertising/marketing, worked with her architect husband in client relations and doing agency work, raised a daughter who is a teacher, and played bass in dive bars. She has shared her homes with many cats. From her Staten Island condo's balcony, she can see New Jersey. From the porch of her house on the Delaware River in PA, she can see New Jersey. Both homes are excellent places to write. Her poetry, fiction and memoir pieces have appeared on line and in print.

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Pulling the Trigger (*The Bond Street Review*)
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