

To Linda, At Creedmore

Sal Cetrano

In games played without innocence, you lost
Everything, no match for the mind's cancer
Or the killing gray corridors of care.
Dredging up our last days brings no answer.
The jigsaw had buckled, your grip gone soft,
Long before the failing was mine to share.

That you were two, your firmnesses and fears
A seamless garment, was truth I could scarce
Absorb on that first night. Hugging, your heart
A ticking time bomb on my chest, one half
Sadly schemed while the other shed steel tears
And left me to drown in the liquid dark.

Yet, I'd rushed at your urgent letter, past
Creedmore's guardless huts and souring brick walls,
Through the herding whispers of the loose-change
Watch whose nicotine gauntlets lined the halls,
Gates sliding, ward by ward, each pasty mask
A threat of you: drugged, short-leashed, estranged.

When, at last, they led you into that pen
Of garish plastic chairs, your beaten eyes
Expecting pills or shocks or whatever,
First you laughed, then I held you as you cried.
But the coin returned on all rehearsal when
You spoke, for I knew you were gone forever.

Stranded so long among islands, helpless
As a burning building, your mind fights back
With cosmic jealousies, with microdots fed
You in your sleep and doctors who caress
You, strapped and gagged, on clammy vinyl racks.
To forgive such hurt is only for the dead,

My dear mad Linda, not for me, love's weight
Of nodding belief more than I can bear.
With no ear for your voices, no gifts of hope,
I lay my love down at this final gate,
Ten thousand nights outside my hungry care:
Souls out of touch, out of time, out of rope.