

Triptych: For the willow, for Pat, for MaJe

To Robert Lavett Smith, from Deena Larsen, December 27, 2010 |

1. *When your soul is in my soul's stead*

This is a heavy burden for a single poem to bear—
in fact, I don't think it can be done.

The subject matter is too rough, [too dark](#)
[a poison](#) with too many [lacunae](#).

We sit on a newly built scaffold
over the oily black winter waters of the koi pond
in [Denver's botanic gardens](#). You wonder
at the raw wood, so clearly out of place here.

I tell you about the old willow
that had reached well beyond my childhood,
well beyond the history of Denver.
I let you hold its solid branches in my mind.

I tell you about how I came here, leaning
my head against the tree, holding its branches
as though they could hold the weight
of my soul forever [without breaking](#).

This was not true.
The willow died a few years back, and they
replaced it with this scar of new wood—
where we now find ourselves.

2. *And I will friend you, if I may*

Pat's smiling photo dominates [your parent's living room](#)
where you are staying, a short winter's visit home—
a short chance to see you before you fly back
[to San Francisco](#)—where you have now lived well over
[half your life](#).

You tell me how complete strangers
now stop you on the bus in San Francisco—
asking you about your other half.

That smile, they say.
Is she gone? How can she [be gone](#)?
You two, they say.
The love in your glances lit up

Comment [History 1]: Five years after Pat's death. Two months and nine days after MaJe's. [And too many to God's](#).

Comment [is too2]: even for Mithradites. Even for our own myths.

Comment [personal3]: With what must remain unsaid.

Comment [confining4]: No, these are not the gardens where I loved with her. Those I still can not enter.

Comment [what must5]: Your parents moved here from New York to retire, and you see them every year.

Comment [remain un6]: Where we met, can it be 25 years ago?—I said it was too urban and fled back to my mountains.

Comment [said7]: You said San Francisco was far too quiet after New York City, and yet you have stayed there ever since.

the winter gardens of our souls.
It was seeing [your faces in love](#), they say,
that made it possible for us to bear
the ocean winds chilled rustling in our bones.

The tears do not come
when you tell them that Pat died five years ago.
Your supply was used up during that [year of her coma](#),
and they have not been replenished.

3. *In the dark and cloudy day*

I watch you write these words about MaJe for me:
*This [house you shared](#) throughout her final weeks,
Rebuilt to suit her cancer, plainly speaks
Of days each labored breath [consumed an age](#)*

I can't write.
I am numb without her. Instead, I tell you
the [hospice nurse](#) said in her thirty years
she had never felt so much love [in a room](#).

I tell you that the week after
she and I met, I could not even remember
a time when she was not in my life—
I could not imagine being without her.

I tell you about the night we met--
she was the only one who ever understood
[Disappearing Rain](#)—and she [got it](#) only from the
tattered notes on my wall.

You. I said. You I will marry.
I tell you about her brilliant writing, her smile,
her soul that survived the horrors of a childhood
they told her was impossible to survive.

In memory

The landscapes of our lives, scarred beyond recognition,
are now built around what is no [longer](#)

Comment [inferring8]: Yes. For you two, it was that obvious.

Comment [only from9]: The year your parents did not come to see you. But that is an entirely different story.

Comment [your own10]: There were so many hospital stories. Like the one where after our first date (on a Wednesday), I had gotten food poisoning. Because of my rare genetic disease, I had lost over half my blood from vomiting in a couple of days. It was not the first time—I knew the drill. But this time, I had MaJe with me—an advocate. So there we were in the hospital and we were fighting for my life on that Sunday.

And all of the nurses who came in said, oh, what a devoted couple. How lovely to see such a kind and loving couple. How long have you been together, anyway?

We did not say "less than a week."

We looked at each other and said "forever."

Comment [memories11]: Possible, imaginable, memorable

Or anything at all.