

Lilacs

(for R. my first gay friend)

1.

You stand on the front stoop
of my late middle age,
arms around a vase of lilacs.

*The last time I gave you flowers
all hell broke loose.*

Your opening line
after a decades-long intermission
catches me off guard.

You deliver the vase into my arms
with a flourish perfectly-timed
to interrupt an unscripted embrace.

I cannot remember my lines, my part
in the scene from our past you've rehearsed.

2.

For the moment I press my face among
flowers you've carried across 35 years:
lilacs in abundance, dark purple, pale lavender,
and, for contrast, maidenly white.

You cannot know how I dwell on the memory of lilacs
long row of tree-sized bushes lining the alley
across the street from my home on Park Road.

Cannot know, I only faintly recall,
a bookish girl, beauty-starved,
pressing her face among lilacs
dark purple, pale lavender, maidenly white,
lost in pleasure.

3.

Suddenly the May night of your story
comes full-bloom for me as my husband enters
stage-right to be introduced.

*Richard gave me a bouquet of flowers
closing night of our high school musical*

and his girlfriend threatened to break up with him!

4. Onstage you were suave Frank Butler
to my gawky Annie Oakley.

Offstage we were the oddest of couples:
boy-girl friends, a love with no name
in mid-sixties, small-town Ohio.

You had a Real Girlfriend fuming in the back-row chorus.
Pretty-equals-popular girl, she was used to center stage,
rides down Main St. propped up on floats, under tiaras.

She exited stage left in angry tears
when you crossed right bearing me
an innocent armful of curtain-call roses.

5.
Tonight, you walk out of the wings, out of the blue,
out of the past, again bearing flowers.

Your words, under a rueful smile tell me you've
borne your shame across half a lifetime:

*She doesn't know how lucky she was
breaking up with me then.
I would have ruined her life.*

What breaks loose is tender memory of you:
handsome, gay, good-boy playing a role onstage and off,

and me: plain, straight, good-girl winning the heart of
hero, if only for the run of the show.

Mary Pierce Brosmer

