Melissa Haertsch

MIGRATION DAY

Ann is dead. Long live Ann.

At dawn the first day we rose and left the city. We drove south, into the warmer, gentler country, not to return until long after decent people stop phoning. We arrived at a harvest festival, more precisely a farm museum harvest festival, which was supposed to feature heritage livestock and plants, old agricultural species which had been saved from extinction for the sake of genetic diversity and auld lang syne. At ten A.M. people were already lined up outside the non-heritage pork barbecue tent, with a similar crowd nearby intent upon demolishing chickens. Food is, after all, the point of farming. A brief look around convinced us that rather than the working nineteenth century farm of the brochure, the farm museum was a bunch of old buildings containing tools and kitchen objects, fortified by some educational displays like the funeral of Jacob Nitz, where costumed ladies told us about poor Jacob's demise and showed us the ice compartment in his coffin. Other women were making cauldrons of apple schnitzel, but more were selling wreathes with calico dolls tied to them and candy that had been made somewhere else, apparently in a factory. The horses and chickens seemed native, but the hog lying in the shed had been imported for the weekend; his run was overgrown. As he lay in the shade, flicking his tail at the flies, I rested my disgruntled forehead on the slats of the stall and reflected that the only difference between this trucked-in animal and me was that he did not know, even theoretically, what awaited him in the end.

We proceeded to the final exhibit, listed on the map as Hog Butchering. I was sure that they did not intend to actually butcher a hog, but outside the last barn, we saw men stirring two large kettles. A long board supported hacksaws, knives and unidentifiable tools, two cookie sheets of labelled organs (do not touch) and an alarmingly familiar-looking snout cut off just below the eyes. At board's end, somebody's grandmother spooned scrapple onto crackers. A little boy munched, poking at the snout's pink tongue, while his dad shook the hand of the man in charge and said how much it pleased him that his boy had seen the butchering, because it was so educational, more real than school. Since my husband and I had missed the lesson, I asked how

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the hog had been dispatched. The man demonstrated the pin gun among the tools, showed me how to load a twenty-two round so that when you centered the gun slightly above the hog's eyes and pulled the trigger, the explosion would drive a three inch metal rod into his brain, felling him instantly. The hog felt nothing, the man said; he opened the take-apart skull so I could see the bore in the tissue. In big factories, he told me, electric cups are attached to the animal's back and a shock kills him.

The man was very friendly, with a big, open smile, pleased and flattered at my interest. I asked if it were a heritage hog steaming in the kettles. No, the heritage breed had not worked out that summer; this was a modern hog. Though clearly disappointed for both of us, his face soon brightened again. There was always next year.

I went away thinking about the man. He was skilled and matter-of-fact; he had raised and killed hundreds of hogs at the family business. He knew that they were intelligent individuals, and he ate them anyway. It made me feel better: that's life. And that brought me to another difference between myself and Yorick, swatting flies in the shed. When he died the next day, his flesh would be cooked and eaten, would do somebody some good. When I died, my family would be forced to pay exorbitant amounts of money to make sure nobody, not even the earthworms I spend so much time attracting to my garden, would eat me. Even animals killed on the road get a better deal: at least crows dine on them, and insects flourish inside. Life returns to the earth. At Ann's funeral, they didn't even lower her coffin into the ground, into the expensive cement box they made David buy so the grave wouldn't collapse and need to be filled. Ashes to ashes and dust to . . . what? To embalming fluid, varnish, hairspray, make-up on a woman who didn't wear make-up.

Summer is over, the harvest has ended, and we are not saved.

Long live Ann.

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First:

Susan called to tell me our Irish friend was sick, that she was having another head-splitting miscarriage. The baby was dead, ultrasounded at half the size it should have been, and it was poisoning its mother. Ann and David went to the Catholic hospital where their second son, Gavin, was born the year before. The doctors put them off: they wanted to run another test, and another, before they would consent to a D and C. Ann vomited and held her skull together with her hands.

I called on Thursday to announce my services. You could not wait for Ann and David to ask for help; they never would. During the first miscarriage, David had phoned and casually mentioned that Ann could not turn her head left or right but was going to drive herself twelve miles to the doctor. This time they were more forthright: I would drive her to her D and C on Friday morning. Friday morning she called. The doctors had cancelled the procedure because one test level suggested that the child might be alive. Ann was furious; she knew they were wrong and was sorely tempted to drive to the nearest abortion facility and take care of things herself. But she was sick and they had promised another test on Sunday, and the D and C Monday. I offered to watch Gavin.

On Saturday morning I took him to my house, where he had a long nap on my husband's tummy. We giggled and took pictures of the scotties sniffing his scalp. Then we cooked and he terrorized the dogs with his walker until it was time to go home. David had not returned from school yet, so Ann came down from bed to let us in. She sat on the sofa in her pink robe and apologized with a faint, ironic smile when she excused herself to the bathroom to throw up. David came home. I urged Ann back to bed, and she went, but she was only upstairs a moment when she began to cry out, to wail to David that she could not see.

I think I called the ambulance. I carried Gavin across the street to the neighbors who were watching Small Stephen. I phoned my husband. I raced to the hospital.

David and I stood in the ER waiting room watching through the open doors while nurses and doctors and who knows who else walked in and out of the room where Ann was. David tried to go in half a dozen times, but was turned back by bigger and bigger orderlies. Then, as we watched, the people entering and exiting the room began to run. Things were beeping; people were being paged. Something had happened.

A doctor took David outside. When they returned he ushered us into a private waiting room inside the ER complex. This seemed as bad a sign as there was. David said Ann was bleeding in the brain; they were doing a CAT scan to determine the extent and location of the damage. He tried to call Ann's sister in Florida; I called my husband. Our friend Llew had come over to sit through the vigil with Big Stephen, and Stephen had fallen over the dog gate on his way to get two beers. His shin was scraped badly. A priest came into the waiting room and spoke comfortingly until I was obliged to ask him to leave. The next-door neighbors provided an audience for us to rehearse and consolidate what we knew so far.

The neurologist's clothes suggested that he had been dining out when paged. He calmly said that the chances were fifty-fifty for Ann's survival, let alone a complete recovery. I tried to imagine her with no sense of humor, an Ann without sarcasm or poetry, a blind Ann, one who could not walk. I looked at David; he was staring at the coffee table. I felt my insides go razor cold, razor straight and strong. The new, hard me began to dissect the prognosis: the doctor defined words we had not understood; he explained why and how blood vessels break, told us what happens when a ventricle—a natural cavity in the brain—fills with blood. He told us what no one had told us before: coma had replaced the frightened, pained Ann with a limp one; pressure from the bulging cavity had snuffed consciousness. The neurologist laid out the difficulty, indeed the impossibility in all that mess of being able to see the burst in order to gauge its size and the likelihood of its closing back up. Although technology could illuminate the fact that our Ann was in great danger, and could monitor the progress of the danger, it could not save her. She would have to mend her own burst, or die.

They moved her to Emergency Intensive Care. The neighbors took David home to find his address book so he could call the family. I walked into the EIC and sat down on a stool and attempted to convey via body language that the nurses should not try to move me. I sang. I sang "Amazing Grace," "Follow Me Up To Carlow," and every other song I could think of. I sang "She Moved Through the Fair":

> She went away from me, and she moved through the fair,
> And slowly I watched her move here and move there.
> She passed through the crowd with her goods and her gear,
> And that was the last that I saw of my dear.

After a while they moved us up to the Intensive Care floor. David returned. Ann's sister, Helen, usually a thousand miles away in Gainesville, was visiting New York state and would arrive by car that night. Other sisters and brothers boarded jets in Ireland. Friends appeared and vanished. I learned to interpret the vital signs on the monitor, watched the brain wave for changes.

There were none. Her blood pressure rose and fell and the nurses medicated her accordingly. The doctors wanted to do another ultrasound in the morning. I looked for four hours at the first page of a garden magazine from the waiting room. A neighbor replaced me at three-thirty.

At mid-morning, irresistibly, I returned. Stephen had cancelled dinner with my parents, knowing that I would not be able to do anything but sit at the hospital. I was in the outer waiting room, talking to visitors before they went in to see David; so many people came that I began to worry that he would be overwhelmed. Suddenly my parents and sister stepped out of the elevator. I was surprised and annoyed in equal measure. Didn't they think I had enough to do without entertaining them? Did they want to smother David and me both? And they always had a terrible effect on me, making me cry when I wanted to keep control; today control was essential. They had brought a box of tissues. I slipped down the hall to David, told him I was hurrying my parents off.

"Are they here?"

"Yes," I said. "Can you believe it?"

"That's very nice of them."

I gagged down two cups of tea before I couldn't stand it anymore. My family graciously stood to leave. My sister hugged me, weeping, and said, "I'm sorry your only friend I like is dying."

That night Mary, the head nurse, sat us down in the room next to Ann's, which they had given us as a kind of private lounge, and told us that David had to start thinking about whether they should try to save Ann if her heart stopped. By law they had to, unless he said otherwise. He also had to consider how long to keep her on the breathing machine if nothing changed, and whether to donate her organs if she died. He said he would think about it overnight.

When we went back into Ann's room, she lifted a finger. Everyone held their breath. She lifted it again. I chased after the nurse. David was exhorting Ann to move her hand again if she could hear him. Mary shone a flashlight into Ann's eyes, but the pupils did not respond; they were completely dilated from the pressure of the blood in her skull. She *had* moved, though, so Mary watched. This time not only Ann's fingers but her whole arm moved, rose and turned in toward her body, then returned to rest. It happened again almost immediately, and the motion included her leg this time. Mary shook her head grimly. "I'm afraid she's completing the hemorrhage," she said.

"The pressure is building on the part of her brain that moves her arms and legs. It's a bad sign."

By the time everyone else left that night, it was plain that David had given up. He went home to kiss his sleeping children and to try to sleep himself. I made up the cot in our private waiting room and lay down on it in my clothes.

I woke just before dawn to the screeing of machine alarms and the announcement to all personnel that a 5-5 was going on in 311. I knew without being told that a 5-5 was my friend dying. I stumbled stocking-footed into the hallway and stared in at a crowd of people trying to start Ann's heart with white electrical disks. This scene would have shocked me more if I hadn't seen it on TV so many times. I stood in the hall, whispering, then murmuring, then finally I think shouting what had suddenly become very plain to me: "Go, Ann," I yelled. "Don't mind them. Go!" A nurse came out and asked me how I was; she asked me to go to the main waiting room to meet David when he arrived. I saw them closing the door to Ann's room. Nobody said she was dead.

I went obediently to the waiting room and made a cup of tea, which I looked at for the long minutes until David arrived. I could not imagine what was taking him so long, except that he had already given up. As I raised the Styrofoam cup to let the steam go up my nose, I had the distinct impression that Ann walked out the swinging doors of the ICU and down the hall to the elevators.

Two nurses arrived, separately, not to tell me that Ann was dead, but to say they were sorry. I was not crying; I was fine. It was better, really, if she was going to be a vegetable. At least her poor husband didn't have to make the call himself. It was very like her, really, to make the decision. She made all the decisions.

I pronounced my rehearsed line to David and Helen; they seemed already to know. We went into the room and sat with her. The machines were also gone, the real reason, I suppose, for my enforced absence. Her body was warm, her eyes unclosable. I pressed my forehead to her hand while David talked softly to her. I did not cry.

I could not remember a single thing Ann and I had ever done together. I tried to call up why I was so hurt and sorrowful about her death, but there was nothing, no trace of why I had loved her, of whether she had loved me. All I felt was an inexplicable aversion to my kitchen.

Second:

During a momentary break in the preparations to feed and house the relatives, I began idly to sift through a pile of photos David had left on the coffee table. They were all of Ann and David in Boston before they moved to our town, pictures of people I didn't know in apartments I'd never seen, having great times which I had not shared. Numbly I flipped photo after photo of the woman I was burying, someone whom I obviously had never known. The next picture had gotten into the pile by mistake: it was Thanksgiving at my parents' house, instantly recognizable because every Thanksgiving picture from my parents' house is the same, the same people and dining room, taken from the one spot in the parlor from which you can see everyone. Disorienting: how did one of my pictures get into Ann's house? I examined the crowd around the fifteen-vegetabled table. There was Small Stephen at the corner. There was Ann beside him. There were David and Big Stephen, and there was me between my aunt and uncle. Ann and David had spent their first Thanksgiving here with us and my kin. This was something we had done together. She was part of my life.

Third:

One visit was so much like another, in those days around the hallway corner now and out of the world like a baby's toy that's lost in the garden, that I can never remember whether we drank three hundred cups of tea to save the tags for my sister, or whether we saved the tags for my sister because we drank three hundred cups of tea. All the visits steep into that milky, browny brew, like the apple bits and graham crackers that grew into dogs and boys, and I dunk the tea bag around and bring out whatever I can find. In goes the bag into that steamy-smelling, kettle-singing cup of visits making forever circles on the kitchen table and out comes Ann and the fortune cookies.

With tears running down my cheeks, I told her the story of our friend, Robert A. Parsons, who appeared at my doorway quite suddenly one afternoon, came into the hall, and looked around, not saying a word. I waited with inquisitive eyebrows until he said, "Do you live here?" I nodded, and he wondered tentatively, he doubted actually whether his daughter were in the house, if this were my house. (She had been visiting Schaeffer's, two doors down.) She was not here. "I see," RAP said. "Well, goodbye." And off he went.

The story cycled with the year, and New Year's Eve came, along with everyone else, to our house. There was a tinseled and electrified juniper in a tub in the front room, and beer and snow in the sink. There were children throwing beach balls up and down the stairs, and scotties sampling the faces of toddlers under the dinnertable, and David stood in the parlor in a Santa hat, reciting a poem about a drunken mouse. Small Stephen opened his presents with a fork. There was home-made pizza and carrot sticks and ice cream, porter and whiskey and eggnog. Llew played the piano and RAP the guitar, and we passed around the basket of drumsticks and slide whistles and plastic eggs filled with beads. Jaime did a gourd solo. At nearly midnight, Ann produced a basket of fortune cookies. We broke them, and they knew our names, and Bob Parsons got one that said, "There's a RAP at the door. Do you live here?" Our howls woke the dogs under the desk, and a heavenly choir joined in with pots on the front porch, banging to the frozen sky.

Years and years and years ago, when there were wild scotties in Pennsylvania, and darktime could be held at bay by the will of small boys, when we were attacked by savage honeybees for standing on their house, and landed safe in the car with a suspicious-looking housefly, when we climbed the hillsides of autumn to gather bittersweet, before daycare, before jobs, before death, Ann bought a house with roses.

But here Small Stephen says, "I got stuck by a rose once, and I bled, and my mom put a Band-Aid on it."

"But these were not the same roses," I say. "These roses not only grew up through the fence and into the hedge, but bloomed from the branches of the swing-strung magnolia, wispled around the chimney, festooned from the porch and strong-armed the hyacinth growing on the windowsill. The roses smote the shambly garage and arched up the trees and sleepingbeautied around all the windows of the purple house."

"It wasn't purple at first."

"It was gray, yes, but when you moved in it turned lavender, with eggplant windowsills and molasses trim. Your grandmother came from Ireland and planted bulbs, and Ann cleared a tiny tomato patch in the hedge. We sat in the kitchen and talked, and Gavin speared Cheerios on his tray, and Small Stephen proclaimed the escape of the dogs from the garden. Then I splatted fast through the mud, and met at the gate my innocent, alley-thrilled terriers, curious, wagging and pert. My heart pounded with car terror and unused dogbody sorrow, and I couldn't decide whether to scold them for going out or praise them for coming back in."

"More about the dogs."

"When Ann came, the dogs godzillaed Small Stephen's sand armies and UFOed into his newly-tilled fields, and once she left Gavin's basket on the floor with Gavin in it. 'It's time he met some dogs,' she said. Rapturously they kissed him, and he yanked their eyebrows manfully, and laughed."

"You have the same ring as my mother."

"One night when we were playing Irish music on another mountain, we met a man who had had fifty beers for his birthday, and he fell in love with Ann. We danced in the kitchen until the musicians called upon her, then she shouted 'The Madwoman of Cork' down the busy house. The man of fifty beers began to cry. He knew by her ring that she was married to some lucky guy, but he needed everyone to know that she was the most beautivul woman he'd ever seen, and it was not just him who thought so: he had brothers and cousins, and they all thought it. We drove away in the dark snow, our own cousins and brothers bewailing their fate, and the rest of us chanting that Ann was the very pineapple of womanhood, and we were all in love with her."

Fourth:

A great screaming bellow burst from me, sobs barking and utterly without control. A pair of arms wrapped around my shoulders. I thought suddenly that Small Stephen would be upset if he heard me making this bizarre sound. I didn't know if he was even in the house, but I quieted myself. Years ago in Ireland, I could have wailed myself dry in perfect peace, could in fact have augmented the family income by wailing professionally, but that was not possible now. I raised my eyes to the face of a stranger, a woman who had just stepped out of the van from the airport. She said, "I'm Patricia."

After we had chosen a casket and warned the plot manager not to dig too near the young spruce that divided Ann from the dead Hallorans, we walked to the funeral parlor to examine the body. David thought her hair looked like Morticia Addams, so the beautician came across the street and trimmed her up, then dusted her off like a sideboard. Mortality makes itself felt in strange ways: death is when your neck doesn't itch anymore, no matter what.

The undertaker asked if we didn't want to put her rosary in her hands. David did not know for sure if she still had one; he certainly didn't know where it was. He was about to have it added to his bill when I remembered mine. I had been given the gold and white beads for my first communion, and had kept them long after I had stopped believing in God. Every now and then

I would glance into the basket of office supplies by my desk and wonder why I didn't throw the rosary out. Now I offered it to David. He hesitated; he would want her to be buried with it. I raced back to the funeral parlor just in time to arrange the beads nicely in Ann's fingers.

A priest from the local parish, a man with Dickensian eyebrows, gave a little talk during the afternoon viewing. He seemed angry and spoke rather harshly of the fact that what lay before us was not Ann. He jerked the rosary to make this point. I got angry too, not at death but at him, because we had just gone to such expense and trouble to make what was left of Ann look decent, and there he was messing it up. When he prowled away in sanctified annoyance with human folly, I marched up and redraped the beads and wondered why I was participating in this ludicrous custom, this ridiculous religion, and how a woman as smart as Ann could have believed any of it. Death is death. Death is why we invented religion, so that this marvelous being who was recently made of intelligence and feeling, this woman we loved, could somehow be not really dead, no matter how things seemed. If only the ultimate reality were not real, the last end not really an end at all but an elevator to another, nicer floor.

At the cemetery, the plot manager shook my hand and showed me how he had positioned the hole so that the tree wouldn't grow over the grave. He was wearing sunglasses and a baseball hat, a T-shirt pulled tight over his paunch. He was a dominoes-around-the-stove guy, pleased with himself and his innovation; he knew I would be too. He did not tell me how sorry he was; we were just being commercial together.

I bawled like an orphan calf beside the grave, indignant that they weren't going to lower her coffin into the ground while we were there. Our Irish bagpiper friend played "She Moved Through the Fair." We took the flowers that were in useful baskets and put them in the back of my wagon. I was sitting on the tailgate, weeping and watching the company disperse, when I heard Ann calling me. My throat turned into a monumental column of stone. The second time she called my name, Helen came around the next car with her mouth still open, relieved that we hadn't left without her and her mother. During the next two or three sentences, I thought I might faint because Ann's voice was coming out of her sister's mouth. Later I noticed that another sister had the mannerisms, and a third told the same jokes. We may not be immortal, but our tics live on.

I'll tell you what kind of town this is: that night, everyone came to our house for the wake. We drank like Vikings and sang and cried and talked about Ann. The usual children and dogs got underfoot. Roger stood in front of the house at eleven P.M. playing the Scottish war pipes. Shortly thereafter the police came, but not for Roger; there had been a city council meeting that night and someone had complained that permit parking was not being enforced in our neighborhood. Stephen went out and told them we were waking Ann Burke, and her husband and tiny children were inside, and all her family from Ireland and England and everywhere else. We were sorry, but we had just buried her that morning and couldn't possibly get permits for everybody. The policemen took the tickets back and tore them up.

Fifth:

On the second and third days, we visited antique stores and lucked into a couple of auctions. Browsing among the belongings of dead strangers amused us at first, and we bought a delicate sleigh-like rocking chair, a superior food grater, and a pine tack box full of curry combs and lead ropes. By the second evening, though, listening to the auctioneer at the fire hall divide goods into his two expensive categories, "Old" and "Nice"—the tack box was neither nice nor old enough to warrant attention, so we got it for two dollars—we tired of watching the ritual dispersal of earthly goods, so we took our box and went home. It was time for decisive action.

Late in the morning of the fourth day after the funeral, as I brewed a pot of cranberry tea and fooled with a thread hanging from the cuff of my bathrobe, my husband came downstairs in a T-shirt and shorts, unwashed and unshaven, and instead of stopping in the kitchen to see what I was doing, continued down to the basement. I heard the back door of the cellar open. When I looked off the porch, I saw the man in the garden with a roll of pond liner and a shovel. He said, "Where do you want it?" The scab on his shin was healing.

We tore out the overgrown tomato patch and dug a hole three feet deep, four feet wide and eight feet long. The dogs ate the millions of cherry tomatoes that fell to earth. Cemeteries have a backhoe with a bucket exactly wide enough to accommodate a cement sarcophagus, so you can dig a grave in a few passes, but it took us all day to dig the pond. Under the topsoil was a layer of ash from the foundation of the former garage, then two feet of orange clay, then bedrock. We put down the liner and filled the void with water from the hose. The scotties sniffed and explored and then acted like the pond had always been there. They drank from it and growled suspiciously at drifting leaves. We tried with mixed success to teach them how to swim out if they fell in; two of the three had to be collar-lifted to safety. As we sat looking at the new body of water, a flock of geese passed barking overhead, then another, then a dozen monarch butterflies, singly.

★

Several months after Ann's death, I called my mother to ask about the prayers said during a rosary. At the viewing, I had been surrealistically afraid that she would recognize my beads in Ann's fingers, and object; she had bought them for me, after all, though it was twenty years ago. We chatted about David and the boys until I gathered my courage to say, "Mom, I gave Ann my rosary to be buried with. We couldn't find hers."

"When Grandmom Haertsch was buried," she said, "we couldn't find the Miraculous Medal she always wore—I mean she wore it every day, I can't imagine what happened to it—so Dad took off the one I gave him when we were first going together, and we buried it with her." She paused. "I got him another one, from you and your sister and me, but it wasn't as nice. It turned his neck green."

"David said that having you at the hospital and the wake was like having his own parents there." He had also said I ought to let my mother and father be real people with their own lives. I was considering this.

He managed to have a stone put on Ann's grave for the first anniversary, a finalizing act that I think cost him a lifetime of effort. With the approach of October, I found I could rehearse her death less painfully. Then one night I heard that an acquaintance was having chronic headaches which her doctors could not diagnose. Suddenly I could not breathe properly or think beyond my friend. I did nothing until Stephen asked why I didn't call her and see how she felt. She felt fine. The pain was irritating, but she was still able to work, and play with her toddler. Exhausted, I hung up. Death's lesson had been learned, and the heart was prepared instantly to recite it.

I dreamed of Ann that night. She looked well. I asked her how she'd been since she died, and she replied with a characteristic shrug, "Ah, you know. It's a bit much, isn't it?" I said it was indeed, and she replied with the sharp intake of breath Irish women use in assent. Happiness flooded me. This was my friend, dear as ever. Freud said that there is no past tense in the unconscious, and I, for one, am grateful.

As the second anniversary drew on, I went to a wedding with my husband and our new baby, just ten days old. The groom was an Irish musician. The bride was a woman I had first met when I was eighteen and our respective dates were a couple of pals now long gone from us and each other. I was nursing my daughter at a picnic table on the edge of the wedding grove when Liz, sister of the groom, came joyously to tell us that her brother's college rock n' roll band—her brother, the best man and an usher—would give a reunion concert. The hired blues band stepped aside and smoked cigarettes while the Irish folks (only Stephen, the piper and a fiddler lady remaining from Ann's day) played "Haste to the Wedding" and "Banish Misfortune," and a new man, American but actually named Paddy, sang "She Moved Through the Fair." I strolled beside the lake in the orange twilight, rocking the baby and instructing her not to cry when gifted tenors sang.

A man approached me, a tall, older man I didn't know, and greeted me by name. "You won't remember me, but I'm the undertaker who buried Ann Burke." Divested of the reptilian business manner of his breed, which had reduced David and Helen and me to covert laughter during our trip to the coffin showroom, he explained that he taught literature part time at an area high school, and that he had had Liz and several other sisters of the groom in class. "How are David and the children?" he asked.

I had not realized before Ann's death that David and I were not really friends, just acquaintances. I had had lunch with him once during the first year, and had phoned him on the anniversary, but he never called back. The oracles on his block said that the children were constantly in daycare or with babysitters, but a friend with good judgment thought that Gavin was sweet and large and flirtatious, and I was inclined to believe it. "I don't know," I said.

The amplifiers came back on and the lead guitar for the hired band told us to welcome back after years of being gainfully employed elsewhere The Internz! The groom and friends thumped into some solid early-80s rock n' roll. I stood breathless beneath a tree, suffocated by the realization that The Internz had played at my high school prom. My husband cavorted out of the marquee, seized the baby, and went skipping off to the dance floor. I combed my mind for memories of that night long ago, and found just one: "What I Like About You." The band crashed through a few numbers they almost remembered, some Rolling Stones and Bob Seiger. My husband sat down; I fanned him while old ladies ogled the baby. The groom, pink-faced and sweaty, took the microphone. They were so out of shape, he said, that they were only doing one more song before they retired to champagne and cake. A black and white yearbook photo passed before my eyes: me in a pink tea-length taffeta dress and black sunglasses, roses in my hair, dancing wildly in a dark hall while a couple of fat-cheeked guitar players jammed behind me, grinning like possums. The Romantics' opening chords crackled in the amplifier, courtesy of a doctor, a lawyer and an accountant, and I grabbed my husband and baby and danced, my past thick around me, spiralling upward, all of my life rising above the white-lanterned tent and flitting tenderly into the crispening dark.

Long live Ann.