GHAZAL:
THE FOOTBRIDGE OVER THE SOMES
Steve Wilson

Autumn arrives, with night perching on my open window.
I watch workers shuffle home, a foreigner at an open window.

When winter retreats, the melting ice reflects like glass—
I wander out. A woman’s robe hangs at a half-open window.

The river, alive beneath the bridge, swims over rocks, bottles,
an empty barrel. What words you whispered at your open window.

Years ago, armies took these streets. “Which side were you on?”
I ask Ferenc, my old neighbor. His face is an open window.

Beside one bank or the other, children play in the alleyways.
I’m alone, waving to ghosts through this open window.

—Cluj, Romania

BONE MAN
Nancy Gott

I. You
hold a bag in your hands,
take out bones one by one.
Seek the marrow of memory.
Construct a poem from this rubble.

II. Me
My body wants to go where you are,
wants to breathe you in.
Oh, essential element of ash,
whose unrequited sigh is this?

III. We
argued over there,
where the virus found
in Foucault’s body found you,
turned you into bone.

IV. Bone
I kick you with my shoe,
uproot you from your grave,
fly you across this ocean.
You sing at 3 a.m.

V. Ghost
From your throat
words spring forth
weightless as water
washing bones.

VI. You
are here,
present in this poem
left behind,
and found.

WORDS NOT SPOKEN

Ellen Sollinger Walker

1.

The first time a picture fell off a wall in our house, I had just gotten out of the shower. Chris, my husband, was just waking up when I yelled, “What was that?” Chris had already been diagnosed with a terminal lung disease by this time, and suffered from a cough I had once called his “pot cough,” until I knew better. He slowly rolled over and turned on the light. A painting had broken its string and crashed down onto the glass dog bowl below it, smashing it and spewing water everywhere.

“Wow, the spirits must be angry about something this morning,” I quipped, combing my wet hair.

Driving to work, “Whiskey in the Jar” came on the radio and I turned it up and sang along:

In walked Captain Farrell
I jumped up, fired my pistols
And I shot him with both barrels.

Whack for my daddy, oh!
Whack for my daddy, oh!
There’s whiskey in the jar, oh

The minute I got to work, my cell phone rang. It was Chris. His voice sounded wobbly and serious.

“David died in a car accident last night.”

“Oh, no,” I whispered and then my heart dipped like a kite that has lost its air, hitting the ground, all spineless and flimsy.

David, Chris’ fifteen-year-old nephew, was always happy, with a wide, goofy grin on his face.

When he was three years old, David’s father shot his mother’s lover
and then shot himself in the head. “There was one more bullet in the chamber,” David’s mother would remind us after drinking too much beer and downing too many Jell-O shots. “That last bullet was meant for me.”

2.

Chris and I were married on 11/11/11. There was a full moon that night. Elevens and perfectly round, full moons were always good omens for us. With Chris, I felt reborn and alive. I loved the warmth of his skin under my fingers. I loved his talent for charming people into doing things for him. I loved how, once, when two bald eagles were circling above our house, Chris lay with me in the grass to watch them perform their graceful waltz above us on a bright blue dance floor.

Chris was hospitalized in December 2013. The lung disease was clogging the delicate membranes, causing him to slowly suffocate. He looked sweet in his green hospital gown while Stella, our poodle, snuggled down in his sheets. A few days before he died, the nurse put him in a recliner like he was royalty, accepting guests. Friends came to visit, old railroad buddies and their kids. I could see the sparkle in Chris’ gray-blue eyes slowly fading, like a chameleon who loses his color on drab, gray stone.

That night, I tried to tell him he was going to die soon, because no one, including his doctors and nurses, had ever said those words to him.

But, I couldn’t say them either. “You will be with God soon,” was all I could get out. What a stupid thing to say. Then, the ventilator was thrust down his throat and that was the last time I ever heard his voice.

3.

Chris died at Christmastime so we couldn’t give each other presents. The present he never got was a photograph I took on our trip to Glacier National Park, reprinted on canvas. After his death, I unwrapped it and hung it on our wall by the fireplace. When I got home from work one night, the picture had fallen off the wall and lay, right-side up, on the floor. Without much thought, I rehung the picture in the same place, making sure it was firmly planted on the hook. The next night after work, the Glacier picture was, again, on the floor. I felt a momentary heart-bomb-burst but, undeterred, I hung it on a different hook. On the third night after work, the Glacier picture remained stationary but a larger photograph, a wedding present in glass, was lying on the floor, face up, directly below its hook. It seemed as if someone had carefully lifted the picture off the wall and, with great love, placed it on the floor.

A few weeks later, I was talking on the phone to a friend about the just-discovered financial disaster Chris left for me after his death. A $45,000 debt that he accrued without my knowledge was now my responsibility to pay back. I was telling my friend how angry I was and “Why would he leave me in this horrible situation?” That night while I was watching television, a painting Chris and I had bought together, which was hanging in the bedroom, crashed to the floor with an aggressive, out-of-control smash.

“Christ!” I yelled out loud and an unbridled fear shot up my spine.

4.

A friend gave me some wrapped, dried sage and instructed me how to perform the Native American “smudging” ceremony. I discovered, after some research, that the purpose of “smudging” was to wash away dark thoughts and unwanted energy or emotion that may cling to a space after someone’s death. That evening, I lit the dried sage like a cigar and walked around my house, allowing the smoke, which smelled like ancient cedar, to float into all the corners of all the rooms. I said gentle words to Chris like “Please find peace and leave this house.” Tibetan finger chimes were also part of my smudging ceremony, an ethereal, heavenly sound rose up to the ceiling with the smoke.

The next day, I was entertaining a friend and I reached into the bottom of a cabinet where I kept my favorite dishes. There, hidden away behind the plates, was my unwrapped Christmas present from Chris, a beautiful silver necklace with a cross, made of bright white opals, hanging gently from its chain. Each opal was oval-shaped and luminous, like an imperfect, warped, full moon.