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## The Picnic

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Alan Feldman

*The Picnic*

Nan, I wish that you and I and all our friends  
were carried back to the past, say to our 30s,  
so the lost ones—like Marty, and Linda, and Clif, and John—  
would be alive again, and not amazed  
or feeling grateful about it, but taking it for granted,  
as we all did back then, when we had more immediate worries,  
like career, or money, or little signs of maladjustment  
in our kids, or if our spouses would put up with us  
through all the coming decades. And we'd be beautiful  
again without much thought about it, some of us  
noting fine lines on our foreheads, on faces  
that look gently used, but young.

And the proportion of the dream we once had of our future  
would again be enormous compared to our past lives  
which would be enormous too,  
crowded with hikes and final exams  
and ferry trips we once remembered,  
and now cannot. And mostly we'd watch everyone hang out  
while the kids would play in the yard or around our feet,  
and now and then someone with a camera  
might remember to take a picture, and we'd be in the background  
behind the children, who were actually meant to be the subjects,  
the photographer unaware how we were changing too,  
and that someday someone would spot Marty  
and think how dark and full his beard looked,  
like a muzhik in a Tolstoy story,  
or Susie when she was still nursing—  
all of us in our prime, fully flowering,  
caught in the middle of not thinking  
much about ourselves. Clif reading to us  
his funny columns railing at everything  
that annoyed him, even lobsters—or, less funny,  
complaining about how workmen were all dyslexic—  
or John, with the twins, fussing with an airplane  
he insisted could climb a kite string, or Marty praising  
their kids' private school . . . and none of them able  
to read their fortunes, or understand how the empire  
of their happiness could someday crumble.

Nan, I wish that you and I and all our friends  
could be there together again, even one afternoon  
under trees whose shade was welcome, never ominous—  
back when our quirks might seem annoying, not endearing  
as they do now, if we can even remember.