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The Picnic

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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,
captured 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.