

Barbara Armstrong

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You never waved good-bye.
Sitting upright in the passenger seat of
your daughter's white sedan,
you held your pillow close to your chest,
looked neither toward our house nor away
but fixed your focus straight ahead
into your own uncertain destiny.
The gate clanged shut. I wonder. . .
did you see me wave good-bye.

On the deck downstairs
your tarnished watering can sits
dry as last week's yesterdays.
Heavy in their oaken barrels
your precious Chinese Jades extend
their sturdy arms in all directions.
Totems of abundance and good fortune
still flank the door of your hide-away
now left strangely open.

Beyond the rail, I see what you
must have always noticed
as the Summers waned—
that gnarled apple tree enacting
the final episode of its season.
So full of promise in July,
the Gravensteins now spill
their knobs of gold and bronze
across the stubbled hill.

The scent of fermentation draws the doe
who lifts her head with calm,
reflective eyes to take me in.
The feral fox that used to sidle
past your bedroom door has
taken to sleeping in your outdoor chair;
its tell-tale paw prints
claim the cushions now
you are gone.

First-Place Winner
2021 Redwood Writers Fall Poetry Contest

The whirl of flight shivers the redwood branches. . .
A feather drifts through loosened air.
Down from the breast of a mourning dove
descends in languid motion, waving
side to side like the gloved hand of a queen.
It rides a shallow tide
and comes to rest upon my palm

like an afterthought
or a talisman.