

Counting

by Joani Reese

Three hundred and sixty-five, eight times gone.?

I want to talk to you again, help you fix a fan,
pound a nail, paint a bedroom yellow.?

We sat numb, exhausted, inarticulate
?while those dark faces that surrounded you
?in your dying turned, tested, timed your breaths, ?

I picture practical watches; thick soled shoes,
and drops ?of Morphine, the gentle hospice man
who lovingly cleared ?the rattle from your throat,
eased your suffering? while we cringed outside the door,
afraid of the tube.??

Two thousand nine hundred twenty days.
?I can't remember, was it a Monday? Thursday??

The pool needs patching, the ceiling, too.?
Your voice remains a constant in my inner ear.?
I miss your stories.

Gato Slindy, the baseball game,
the ex-lax.?The neighbor tossing filthy wash water ?
from her window calling, "for the birds."?

Some say the forgetting begins before the first hour?
recedes, as colors bleed to gray, one by one
?until there are none but shades of shadow
?left to trouble the air.

I want to show you the fence I painted,
trim a hedge with you. ? ?

Eight autumns, eight springs.
?Rain shreds the sky in silver filaments less
and less now--Last winter, hail bulleted
the pool's surface and startled the cats
from their slumber.?

Pete's muzzle is grizzled now,
his bark tosses flute-like ?against the morning air
to frighten no one.
I am older.

The light seems changed, and winter blows warmer
as city buses' brakes shrill beside the house
?to trouble my sleep.

?
I recall your nose, how prominent
and Roman ?at the end; that thin,
clarified line at the finish,
?
how your earlobes curled to shamrocks,
so soft beneath my fingertips,
still warm.

