

The Dark

Category: Poems

written by Francie Camper | September 22, 2017

Francie Camper ~

Parkway, three a.m. Ambient light.
Try to shake off the sleeping pill.
Open car window. Rock station 104.3
Watch the divider, the white line.

Count the other cars on the road,
make up stories to stay awake.
Don't miss the exit for the Interstate.
Don't miss the Willis Avenue Bridge.

Twenty-six minutes to a parking space.
Forget to read the parking sign.
Shoulder heavy bag: water, apple,
book, journal, healthcare proxy.

One desk and three doors into the
emergency room. Ask the first
person. Ask the second. The third.
Oh she's in X-ray, it'll be a while.

Pace. Shake with exhaustion.
Fear, nausea, fury. Disaffected
doctors, nurses, accents, introduce
themselves and drift away.

She yells at me. She yells at them
for calling me. Two falls in two weeks.
She tells something different each time
she tells it. She is old. I have to last.

Take care of everything, find who will
listen, who will follow up, more X-rays,
cardiac workup, ten hours in the ER,
two shifts, get her out before the third.

Get her out before the third shift, get
her home, settled, warm, medicated,
safe, get the refills, the list for her aide.
Get out fast before the next time.

About the poet:

Francie Camper is a clinical social worker in Westchester County, NY. Her practice has long included families dealing with illness and bereavement. To deal with the intensity of many years of clinical practice, she began writing

and studying poetry a dozen years ago at the Hudson Valley Writers' Center, where she has also served on the board. She continues in an independent workshop and has published works in the [Vineyard Gazette](#). Many of her poems are composed while swimming, when possible in open water.

About the poem:

"This is one of a series of poems I wrote during the years when my mother was declining; she died in 2013, at ninety-one. She was a woman of great intelligence and accomplishment and boundless energy, curiosity and humor. She was also demanding, manipulative, relentless and infuriating. It was not easy to be her daughter, so when I was faced with the full responsibility for her life and care over many years, coupled with a full-time psychotherapy practice, I looked to poetry (along with swimming, and great support from friends and family) to ensure my own survival. It was so important to me to manage her with compassion, patience and humor, and to enable her to live out her life as she chose, despite how impossible she could be. Poetry guided and restored me throughout, and helped me to reach peace of mind once she was gone."

Poetry editors:

Johanna Shapiro and Judy Schaefer