

A PARTY FOR THE PRODIGAL

Let's suppose a minute while we gaze  
in our coffee cups: The old parable  
just needs a gender change.  
Let's say the subject's name is "Pat"  
since "Patricia" confers dignity  
and "Patsy" seems more suited to her sister who—  
But, let's not call her sister anything at all.

Suppose "Pat" ran away with some man.  
Plus her father's savings and his car.  
Maybe she thought of it as her inheritance  
but she didn't ask. Suppose her father took  
a second job to hire a private eye  
who found "Pat" in Vegas-- a battered butterfly  
wallowing in the powder off her wings.  
Alive and laughing in glaring gold neon.  
Her father sent her money to come back.  
Instead she played the one-armed bandits  
in the hotel johns and latched onto another John,  
a ditto of the first.

Imagine two years whisked away like bets  
on a whirling wheel. The pleas. The money  
borrowed and sent. Suppose the father has a stroke.  
His other daughter pays his bills, struggles  
with his therapy, watches age and sorrow  
weaken the stake each day.

Then suppose "Pat" called last Sunday, wanting  
to come home. The man in the second-hand walker  
is overjoyed with answered prayer. He begs  
the faithful daughter to send her sister  
a ticket. And buy a fancy cake.

Just pretend the nameless good girl  
didn't say she has no sister. Forget she refused  
to meet the bus. Once she masters forgiveness  
maybe she'll understand celebration. But listen--  
if she's a little late for the welcome-home gala--  
do you suppose someone could ask her dad

to please say a prayer for her?