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The Pearls

by Lyn Lifshin

An engagement present, from my husband's parents.
Shoved in a drawer like small eggs waiting to hatch,
forgotten. They seemed like something in a high school
photograph. I'd have preferred a large wrought iron pendant,
beads that caught the sun. Pearls were for them

and I was always only a visitor, tho he said he wished
I'd call him Dad. Sam was all I could get out,
it was hard to throw my arms around him, to bubble
and kiss. And not just because they thought
me a hippie, a witch, thought I took

their son's car and stamps and coin collection.
Pearls wouldn't go with my corduroy smocks, long black
ironed hair. They didn't blend with my hoops of onyx
and abalone that made holes in my ears but caught the light.
Pearls might have gone with the suits I threw away,

no longer a graduate student trying to please.
They weren't suitable for days with a poet hidden in trees
or for throwing up wine in toilet bowls after poetry readings
where I shook and swore not to let anyone see. My spider medallion
is in at least eight poems. Pearls remind me of the way I thought

I was: studious but not wild, not interesting. But I put those pearls
on last night tho I hadn't planned to wear them. They didn't seem ugly
or apt to choke, seemed gentle and mild as so little is in my life
these days. I slept in nothing but those pearls, they seemed
part of me.

