Cemetery Lunch
for Anne

We lunched on a tombstone throughout that hot summer. Fish and chips, I remember; you carried it all in a basket. The tombstone, long and flat, was the right size for a table. Others, too, picnicked nearby in Boston’s historic cemetery. “Do the dead mind?” I asked. You said, “They’re appalled.” We decided to stay anyway.

You, my first editor, smiled. Your flinty eyes saw things I missed or chose to ignore. At seventy-five, you were fit, gray, tall, thin; a sapling. At twenty-five, I was not fit, a fey small-boned redhead. What an odd pair we were, bound tight as twin sisters, lovers of books and words, haunters of musty libraries.

You ate steak, drank gin, talked tough when needed, smoked small black cigars. At our gravestone lunches, you never spoke of your life as your fingered the grass. “I’m acclimating,” you said, Three days later, you died. No one knew of the cancer racing through your body; you’d chosen to go on alone.

No graves are open now in “our” historic cemetery but I still think of you there. And I still see us together, alive, lunching at that tomb, laughing, appalling the dead.