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Puzzle

She liked Jigsaw puzzles, I could never understand why.
But I bought them for her, even so.
She kept doing them even as she grew bent with age
and beneath her old, gnarled fingers a picture would grow.

She'd pile the pieces onto the big dining-room table
that my father had built, and was rarely used.
Organising them by shape and colour,
I suppose it gave her something to do

between late-morning breakfasts of marmalade on toast
and falling asleep watching TV in the afternoon,
she'd push her stroller to that table and entertain herself
solving puzzles in the dining room

where no one dined: she'd find places for all the pieces,
and makes sense out of chaos and soon there was portrayed
a castle, or a ship, a coral-reef or a cathedral;
she brought them together, and then they fell apart as she put them all away.

Back into a cupboard full of puzzles, and after a time
she'd bring them out again and, with hands that would shake,
once again she found order and somehow made a picture,
gathering together all those little awkward shapes.

One day when I visited the puzzles were gone,
no longer possible for someone so old and ill.
Her days were spent sleeping, she only woke to visit the doctor
and be given another prescription for the ubiquitous pills,

Until the day, in a moth-eaten church,
we walked her out, down the aisle.
Then we all went back to sit around that table
and it felt like a family, for a while.

And as the embers of her presence grew cold
and the gathering broke up and, bit by bit, departed
I found a lone piece of a long-gone jigsaw puzzle;
a silly reliquary for the broken hearted.

Her ghost did not approve; she didn't like lost pieces.
She wryly smiled and rolled her eyes and made a disparaging remark.
It was someone else's job now to find a place for it to fit.
I put the puzzle in my pocket; and then I fell apart.

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