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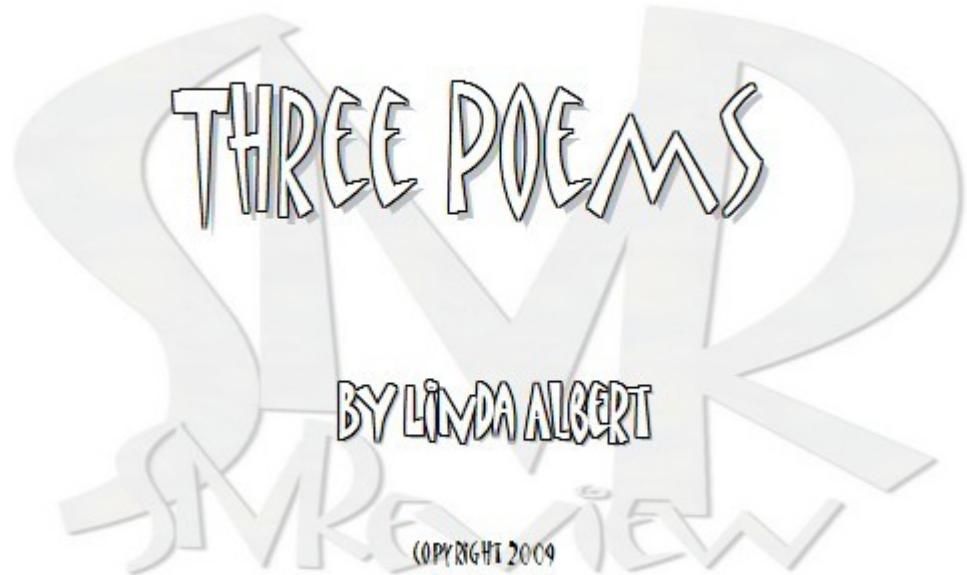
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### **This Is the Year the Dead Come Marching**

This is the year the dead come marching,  
Not soldiers, accident victims,  
strangers we cluck our tongues about  
and then go back to eating, shopping,  
making much of small things; no  
now it's a parade of people we know;  
young, old, our age – the nerve -  
old friends, old loves, the man who did  
our hair, a new acquaintance full of promise,  
a colleague, and a cousin's husband -  
waving flags of their uniqueness in our faces,  
leaving images of themselves - *kirlian* photographs  
implanted on our eyelids, their voices  
engraved inside our ears. This year,  
we're surprised by too many ghosts,  
they deliver packages tumbled  
with ribbons of memories; confettied  
with regrets. We're not ready for this.  
There is unfinished business; forgiveness  
we had yet to find, get well cards  
we never got around to sending, soup  
we never brought, words we thought  
we still had time to say, caresses, hugs,  
some needed thank yous. The dead  
celebrate their endings despite us.  
The band is playing just for them.  
They turn the corner without us.  
They are at peace. They leave  
their auras behind for us to carry.  
The littered street is ours to clean.

### **Sometimes It All Dies**

those creative juices – like the red grapes

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in the glass dish on the top shelf  
of the refrigerator, now wrinkled  
as raisins. No longer fit to be consumed,  
yet no one wants to throw them out,  
as though some miracle of resurrection  
might still be possible.  
Or maybe someone will still come along  
starved enough to want to eat them.

How does this happen – weeks of harvest -  
poems and stories sweet on every vine and bush  
then gone one day, a waste land?  
As though words have lost their strength  
to grow; the passion in the writer's soil  
turned barren.

What is needed here? Plow through, sow seeds  
so poor and piteous that only weeds would likely flower;  
hope anyway for rain and blooming, or heed the wisdom  
of the farmer who knows when time has come  
for land to rest, lie fallow?  
And oh, to know the difference.

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## Reflection

I remember it vividly -  
how I was taking my nightly bath;  
lying naked and a little chilly in the tub,  
not thinking about anything special,  
or pondering a different problem  
as Auden knew the Old Masters  
understood. Only this time  
it was the relief of suffering - a jolt  
in every cell so great my body  
leaped. It's a wonder  
I wasn't electrocuted –  
found floating face down;  
bath oil sliding in greasy scales  
down my lifeless back, just now  
when knowing could make my life  
begin. The usual irony. But no;  
there's also magic in these tales.  
The mirror I'd looked in all those years,  
the *Mirror, Mirror on the wall*;  
that kept me snared and found me wanting;  
whose tarnished silver  
backed a bleak and murky surface  
rejecting light, was nothing but an object;  
mirrors don't really talk, or have opinions.  
Amazing that I never noticed.  
Turns out it's voice was in my head;  
the power was mine to name the seeing.  
not a jealous Queen's who'd kill for my reflection.

The Old Masters must have also known

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*this human position;*  
how something momentous can happen  
while someone else is eating or opening a window  
or Icarus has not fallen after all  
into the sea.

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**Linda Albert's** essays, creative fiction and non-fiction short stories and poems have appeared in many publications, including *McCalls Magazine* and *The Wall Street Journal*. Linda's awards include the Olivet and Dyer-Ives Foundation Poetry Prizes and *Atlanta Review's* International Merit Award for poetry. Linda lives and writes in Longboat Key, Florida.