If I had time

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If I had time to write a poem, then
I’d make the subject this mother of two,
Now forty-four, unable to speak,
Her husband’s anger a reproach to my training
And skill. Or the retired physician’s wife who
So silently slipped away last year,
Her brain’s decay explained but unexplained.

But we had toast this morning, and jam, and then
Packed lunches and sent the boys to school;
We shared the paper, and a pot of tea,
And talked about the candidates’ speeches that
Went on too long, then kissed at the door.
“Will you be home for dinner?” you asked me.
I shrugged. “I’ll call you later,” you said.

Sweet luxury our later. And then
The day, like others before and still to come,
A flood of patients, papers, lectures and letters,
Passed deadlines, and dead lives. Past hope,
She too is speechless, offering only a shrug.
To my “I think you’re getting better.”
After, an old man holds his wife’s hand, and copes.

This once, at least, I’ll make the time to write this poem.
If I had time
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