Have you ever messed up a relationship
That really mattered
Or lost two breasts to cancer?
My friend Annie has.
And my father has held the hands
Of two dying wives.
He has seen one daughter go insane
And the other go, nowhere.
Yet he survives, at eighty four years young.
To play golf everyday with his girlfriend
Who escaped Hitler’s ovens 50 years ago
And remembers her cousins who did not.
When do bad things happen
To good people?
Bad things happen all the time.
God prepares, we do the cleanup.
My secretary killed herself last week.
My lover didn’t.
And their actions speak less about their pain
Than their approach.

You might imagine that such an act
concerns only the immediate players.
A wedding of two, two alone,
paired off and out of the running.
But we, we too, all of us,
who come together
to celebrate this sacred day
know a very different story
is being told:
You are our collective wish for love
and continuance and joy—fulfilled
You are our promise of redemption.

1In the traditional Jewish wedding ceremony, seven blessings are recited over the couple. The fifth blessing is a prayer asking for redemption.

by Hellen R. Weingarten

Helen R. Weingarten, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor at the University of Michigan School of Social Work. Besides writing poetry, Dr. Weingarten currently writes, consults, and teaches about conflict and collaboration.