

Blessed Exit

My death will bless my sons with money,
and one less Christmas mouth to feed,
for I bring little to the table now but need.

Fair is fair: I never shed one tear
for either parent's passing, till long after—
pent-up guilt and rage, their love's legacy,

Along with a substantial portfolio of stocks,
a reasonable transaction, though I might have traded
a few shares of AT&T for a bit more affection.

Is an unmixed blessing ever a possible bequest?
My strong, silent sons hide their wounds.
Or—who knows?— have none.

Soon enough I'll be where they can love me best,
safely in their past, but who can say how long that
first and foremost of all loves will last?

Death, a Poor Metaphor for Loss

From a distance and in dreams,
divorce looms like death itself,
the irretrievable loss of children,
but on arrival,

We all survive, scathed but intact.
Love of sons, no longer fraught
with fear of loss,
instead, grown stronger.

Sons grow up fast and quickly learn,
there's no St. Nick, and love may not last.
But they move on—homework, hobbies,
sports and friends,

While we still try to make amends.
They teach us—and we rejoice to learn—
that guilt exaggerates our importance
in their story.

We speak of lives uprooted, ruined, destroyed,
but life's a stubborn thing, not easily swayed
by hyperbole, and causing pain is as much a part of it
as our heartbeat or our breathing.

Love Withheld

Acceptance of my current self
renders past selves even more untenable.
What a terrible person that me was!

Only a court of law can distinguish
some acts of mental anguish
from ordinary crime.

A decade after the fact,
you still needed the love I deprived you of.
I still required your forgiveness.

When, amplified by time, those needs collided,
we hired six professionals—lawyers and therapists—
to repair the damage.

Then, having transferred the worst of our pain
to our families, we were finally free
to go separate ways, intact, complete—

I, guilty, but forgiven in the court of your opinion,
both of us, still true-believers
in the absolute necessity of our selfishness.

Past Imperfect

What appalling lies our diaries tell.
We never know the weight or worth
of any moment in the moment.

The shaped version we later recollect
more accurately reflects the truth:
the narrative now knows its place.

If we must keep contemporary records,
we should lie from the outset: let those notes
launch our hopes into the future,

Like tossing a stick for a dog to fetch,
and each time the dog returns, we're standing
closer to where the stick landed.

The dog's not confused, and neither are we,
even if the stick retrieved is not the one we threw.
After all, the dog changes too.

Until both our futures are so foreshortened,
there's no choice but turn and look behind.
And still we are surprised by what we find.