

Grandfather's Journey

Toward the end of the Great Depression, the tobacco crop having failed for the third year, and at the end of money saved, my grandfather picked up his shotgun and set out on a journey. They said he just unlatched the gate and kept walking, walking, past the *Get Right With God* wooden cross and chickens in the yard at Miller's Store, past Jonathan Caine's pasture, past Cader Gwinn's woods where leaves waned russet and burgundy and deep, deep brittle brown, the last of fall and the best, in Bryson's Cove, and disappeared into sun so bright no one could keep up or follow,

taking the love of his life,
a beagle named *Reason*,
along the path with him.
All this was told to us children.
All this was before we learned
they only lied about important things.

One night the following May, air drenched with pear scent, while brother slept and sister slept, I crept to the dim step landing, drawn by Pastor Shaw's whispered drawl:
The Lockes heard the shot, across the line in Tennessee.
I pictured old Will Locke, standing drunk before first frost under his one fruit tree, tossing Golden Delicious apples alive with yellow jackets into a dirty sack while inside his young, pretty wife jerked at the shotgun sounds once, eyes dark and savage in a white face, bit her lips until blood came, then checked again that the grandfather clock was properly wound.

THE SMELL

of today's fresh newspaper

nudges a feeling inside
and unmined and which I can't name.
Help me with it:

What do I call childhood,
sitting on Father's lap
opening the paper together
and pulling out the comics?
Ashes fall on his leather vest
and his clothes smell of Turkish
tobacco and the oh, so fine print
of the paper
as he reads
Dagwood Bumstead
and *Popeye*
then walks
to the second floor
and down to the first floor
and out the door,
gone,
a hook embedded
in a fish who can't name it,
a book handed to someone
who will only, but swiftly,
close it.

And how does the fish explain the hook?

*It is like
swimming
under the roof of all sadness
in an old, submerged tabernacle*

What the Abandoned House Says

Stillness is such a beauty

----- Rumi-----

They lived inside me
with wives built
like Baptist churches,
bred blue-tick hounds,
made moonshine,
they lived inside me
but when they left
I lived inside them,

 heavy with meaning.
In dreams they discover
secret doors, unexplored
rooms, rogue dandelions:
all now left to me.
I love the way
the sea smells,
the plover overriding updrafts
on south-facing slopes,
muscadines rotting
on the tin roof,
slant of late-afternoon
sun across the floorboards,

just so.

I watch the jack pine
creak itself straight,
The garden, gleaming
cool and white
come night, outshines
the muscular moon
in this world
of sand, stone,
and blood.

KING DAD

As solace for my little brother Arthur
(I call him *Toothpaste*) I've brought him to Granny's
for a late-day walk. *Arthur, where are you?*

I'm o.k. from Arthur,
this again and again, it's his idea, makes him feel secure
as he darts in and out of Central Park bushes
beside our path.

Granny reads to us about King Djoser
who ordered two step pyramids built at Saqqara
one thousand years before Moses. Took 10,000
men to build the world's first stone sepulchre
and bury Djoser along with twenty living servants
as companions on his journey to the Afterlife

*(Send out Your light and Your truth,
let them lead me).*

Arthur thinks Djoser needs instructions to the Afterlife
and pens this: "Ride the crocodile down river

to a barge lit by Chinese lanterns
with 26 musclemen and a harp.

They sing in unison, '*Follow me,
follow me to your beginnings
toward the center of Orion's belt*'.

It seems an incredibly long journey, sighs Arthur
and suddenly we're all holding each other,
remembering we'll never again see the freckle
on Dad's right knee, crying for people
leaping through windows, clothes afire,
praying for the pilot of the steel death machine,
praying for the shattered wristwatch on the sidewalk,
hands at 9:30, weeping for all who sleep in cornfields
or in the lap of woods, weary from wandering,
but never too close to get hurt.

I miss my Dad, says Arthur

We eat double-chocolate brownies on a quilt
as light recedes to reveal a billion stars, revenant and present all along.

**MORNING WALK WITH THE DOG
THROUGH A CEMETERY IN CLARENDON COUNTY,
WHERE WE TOOK STOCK**

Each morning Megan and I visit the dead.
I mean, it is quiet here.

We've made friends:

*Good day, Verona T. McHam,
(alive only one day, November 30, 1938
'One Little Bud to Bloom in Heaven').*

Augustus Gilliam lies without strife
among his five wives,
one with the unlikely name of *Fester*.

I remember a dirt road on Edisto Island
leading to what had been a manor house,
No Trespassing everywhere and to the side
the family cemetery where we found Indigo, age 19,
and her twin infants, Ariel and Gabriel,
all dead July 7, 1807, '*Buried with faithful tenderness
by her loving father, Robert Mears McClintock, This
8 July, 1807 A.D.*'

*You, I say to myself, Yes, you!
The years rock by, it's time to take stock.
Confess the nadirs of your experience,
the murders you've committed.*

Thousands of ants and flies, 97 Brown Recluse spiders.
I killed a Luna moth once, it made one helluva mess,
iridescent scales across the screen for weeks.
I had to buy a broom.

I murdered myself when I let you go.
Stretched beyond belief, Megan and I walked
for weeks and wandered. The weather was O.K.
as long as we had a rock to hide beside.
Under my shoe the spider's red hourglass
resembles a flattened black pearl.
Her legs curl.