

Visiting Day, White Deer Rehabilitation Center

A cheap ceiling fan
Whines a restless rhythm
Nine feet above the
Paneled room of
Mismatched furniture and
souls awaiting the Sunday
orientation to
addiction.

Residents pace in the next room
Awaiting a reason to threaten
Already charred foundations;
Desperate to strike the next match
Before tears flow again across
Years and generations of addicted genes.

Some have come today for answers.
Most understand, no answers live here.

A kind, familiar man,
35-year addict (here to visit his
Daughter in treatment)
Shares hard truth with a
Shattered mother,
Meets her gaze and
Unburdens his heart, as though
She were his mother, his priest,
His audience.

Exhausted, bitter and raw,
The room of victims braces
Before the patients are admitted.
Brief calm before the torrent of tears,
Promises and ultimatums; the
Strange peace of the
World broken open,
Honest in
Sickness of itself.

Tarot

“Be stoic, impassive.
Remain strong.”
(Lessons from my
Childhood recalled)
“Remember,
Psychics play off
Emotional cues.”
Self-admonishments
Echoed within as she lay each
Card down and spoke the word
Again and again –
 “WATER”
And felt the well deep within
Betray my rebuke.

I was 23-years old in
New Orleans’ French Quarter,
Hurricane drunk;
Expecting premonitions of
Love or tragedy;
Unprepared for an
Innocuous message, so
Deep and personal, it
Breeched the dam of my
Intellect and released
A force refusing submission to
Rise up and
Flow free in
Rivers down my
Face.

Indian Summer

and without warning, the
Appointed day
Arrives with
Morning frost.
Lush summer
Falls into
Autumn's merciful
Arms
Exhausted,
Satisfied.

Learning Grief

Not unlike Braille -
Fingers trailing slowly over
Foreign bumps
Urgent with meaning
After childhood protected from
Blindness.

My father's mother died
When I was eleven –
My first experience with death.
Grandma Kohler surrendered
Part of her tongue to cancer
Before I could remember her otherwise.
I confess her strangled speech,
Cigarette staleness and
Creaking 19th century house
Aided my mother's curriculum in the
Safety of fear and separation.
My father left it to us to choose our own lessons; to
Take what we might from his silence.
He shared nothing of his younger life,
Before her sickness –
The days she filled painting
Vibrant still-lives and portraits on vases and china.

I remember my shock and
Surprise at my father's
Tears, after the phone call
Interrupted the evening's television
Programming and his
Struggle for words to explain that
His only mother had died.

It now seems someone should be
Ashamed, awash in regret.
Yet then, an inconvenient wrinkle like
Death could hardly be cause for such an
Emotional display.

Decades later,
(in the middle of the night)
That 11-year old boy
Stumbles through swamps of
Confused emotions in a
Parallel life trying to
Stay awake, steeped in
Subtle resentment -
Robbed of the chance to have
Adored or loathed my
Grandmother from my own
Experience instead of the
Story they wrote, and
Still understanding their
Misguided need to protect their
Children from love and
Themselves from the
Shame we can't admit.

Eighty

My neighbor Ruth
hurts.
She knows little beside
Pain, these days, and winter is coming.
Still she offers me a
Genuine smile.
Her dear husband Dick
Died the year before we
Bought the home next door.
They raised four
Children who now live in
New Jersey and California.
Though I never met Dick,
I feel his void in her house.
Ruth is strong and kind, and she has seen
Much pass, but fifteen years later, I
Know his absence sometimes
Blindsides her.
The world carries on.
Her garden will bloom next
Spring and Summer;
And the Amish girls below will come
To help on Wednesdays and Saturdays.
Neighbors and children will
Help, when we can.
I hug her now sometimes,
When I might not have
A few years ago.
She complains gently
And appreciates that I may
Laugh or ignore what we can't
Help.
Next month I'll find the ladder and hang the
Christmas wreath on her chimney, then I'll hang it again
A foot higher.
Later I'll buy spotlight bulbs, because the old ones
Were in a box that one of her sons
Took home to New Jersey.
I'll climb into the attic and cover the house
Air vent with old sleeping bags and blankets,
To keep out the draft.

45 minutes' effort, all told, still
More valued, by far than the rest of the week's
Accomplishments.