

# *Losing Family*

## *To My Friend*

I wish we could go back.  
Don't you? To when we both  
Were too young to think about age.  
But now we're here as the sedative takes effect.  
You breathe a little deeper and feel a little lighter.  
I know this is a strange place and nothing wants to die here  
But I'm here. My fingers are running through your coat  
As they have so many times before.

Still, I can't quite shake that I'm doing this to you,  
Undoing you, making this choice, bringing you here.  
You inhabit so many memories I want to keep  
That this one, your last, feels more like betrayal than goodbye.  
See, you're a friend, you're family, you're loved,  
And, as best as I can tell, you *are* love. But I'm here.  
*We* are here in a place where nothing wants to die,  
Keeping an appointment *I* made to do that very thing.  
So these tears are sorry ones; they well from a deeper and purer sadness  
Than I have ever known, and my fingers run through your coat  
As they have so many times before.

But I know you have suffered. I know because I have.  
And I know that it feels good to forget all that,  
To remember home or peace or nothing at all.  
I'd like to think that now, as you feel the easy release  
Of this life leaving you, you're going back one more time.  
You're that puppy and I'll be the boy.  
Together, we are in that memory and we escape this one.  
This is a place where nothing wants to die—  
Not you. Not my childhood—  
But we are not here. Your eyes are almost closed and so are mine.  
My fingers are running through your coat one more time.

You don't have look at anything else  
But me.

### *Burying a Fireman*

When grandpa was lying in the coffin, skin taught and cold,  
I was sitting next to it in that old country church throbbing in sad heat.  
I was taught too, stretching inward, lurching, trying to hold  
Things in that wanted out.  
What I mean is that, being a fireman, he should  
Have been able to cash in some of the years he saved.  
What I mean is that, being in a church, I should  
Have been able to find a god to put down the rising scream in me.  
I unhinged as they shut it up, as they waited, waited not for life or death but dirt.  
See crying is downhill, rolling out of control until still in some settled place.  
And I was not settled yet. My momentum was fierce, full of weighted hurt.  
And they waited, waited to bury his still smoldering embers under damp clods.

Now though, from a hill that's seven years away, I can see  
That the stories I love have quietly lied.  
Story is not time—Grandpa is not a failed conclusion.  
Time is fire, warming and burning us up, lit by something out there in the dark.

## *Inheritance*

Opening the old notebook labeled “Journal - 1976”  
I meet grandpa Richard and shake his hand in the words—  
In pale pencil, a cursive curiously comparable to mine—I fix  
My eyes across the text, past the hazy dusk of death and time.  
I know him by his misspellings, his spare  
Punctuation, and his notes on the price of sheep.  
I know too from the dirty fingerprints and wear  
On the pages, that I am with a man who loves living by the soil.  
And he tells me of grandma Rosy, who—why  
Can’t I remember her voice? Is this the same forgetting  
Dad told me about?—Anyway, grandpa smiles (just like I  
Do) if he even thinks about her lasagna, best eaten cold.

But that smile flattens out as he tells me about his son  
Who is away. It’s the same way on dad’s face when,  
Alone, he thinks of me. I guess some things just run  
In the family and some things run away from them.