

Dinner With My Brother At Zarda BBQ

*You have to eat,
even on death watch
he said, sauce smiling
from his mouth to his ears.
Slathered ribs and onion rings,
beans and coleslaw,
no room to lay meatless bones.
A pitcher of Coors Light.
A handful of napkins.*

I poured myself a beer.

*What we gonna do when she dies,
I mean, with the stuff in the house?
I want the red chair.
I need the computer desk
and the curtains in the living room,
my wife likes the silver bracelet
dad gave her for their anniversary.
What do you want?*

*Another beer, I said,
filled my glass,
pushed aside my food.*

I wanted to be drunk.

I wanted to be eight years old,
squatting like Johnny Bench
between the white meadowsweet
in our front yard.
I wanted to drive Matchbox cars
down roads smoothed in summer dust
past giant green army men -
mine sweepers, radio operators,
angry soldiers with rifles raised
prepared to pierce their enemy
with a plastic bayonet.
I wanted my father to come home,
carrying his black lunch pail,
cuffs of his pants rolled up,
Pall Mall ashes defying gravity.

I wanted to play catch,
to feel the sizzle of his fastball
pound my supple mitt
and then to sit and oil my glove
wrap it around a baseball,
slip it under my pillow and sleep on it,
force the pocket to conform
to the shape I wanted.

Between the Every Day

Once my dad stacked skids with wrapping paper
wearing one black dress shoe and one work boot.
Once he told a waitress he wanted his eggs black.
He thought she asked about coffee.
One time he backed Sam Salaman out of our yard
for calling my mom a heifer.
Once he invited me to tell him of Jesus.
His doctor predicted cancer.
One time he left his teeth in the seat of the Ford.
My blind date sat on them and screamed.
Once my dad asked if "I got any" when I came
home from a date. I smelled like sex.
One time I asked him about the war and he talked.
Usually, he went to bed.
Once my dad sat in the backseat and cried while I
drove the family through Yellowstone.
No one knew why.

Father's Models

As a kid he played alone,
placed tin slugs on the tracks
behind his bedroom
and waited for the KATY
to press them thin
like the communion wafers
he stole when his grandpa
took him to the Presbyterian
church for a box of food.

When the train passed
he saw men framed in the shadows
of open doors, a family portrait
flickering like a kinoscope
at a penny arcade.

He waved to them,
fathers and uncles
brothers and sons
huddled in boxcars
smoking and drinking
bush whiskey.

He Chose

He chose these shoes instead of those
based on the distance from his toes
to the end of the wingtip.
It's what you do when you choose a shoe.

He chose these pants, the navy blue,
the khaki seemed to add a few
pounds to his portly frame.
He chose this shirt, the 2XL,
and doesn't tuck it in. It fails
to hide his man-boobs and shame.
He chose this hat, the gray fedora
because he knows it's hard to ignore a
natty middle-aged man.

Some friends would doubt free choice
belonged to him, it's God's small voice
directing his affairs,
though he doubts God cares of his affairs.