

A Grandfather's Last Lesson

At two, you had your water wings
and learned to splash into my arms.
In time you launched wingless arms
across the gap to the pool's far side.

Four years later, I showed you how the row of pawns
lines up in front of the castle to the queen on her color.
Now others teach you classic openings and defenses
beyond my horizon.

If I must also be the one to teach you a last lesson,

about death,

I will not do it gladly.
I would never choose to leave you.

I hope to keep my wits as I slip away,
to leave you my appreciation
for who you are.

If I must be that teacher, I ask to be
a good example, show courage,
keep fear from between us
as I depart.

If we have time, I will teach you
to breathe bubbles and visit coral
with the white tip reef sharks,
We will listen to whales' melodic greetings.

My loss will be over in that last moment.
I hope your loss will be softened
by the love left to linger with you.

In the end,
I am only required
to stop
living.

One with the Gang

Orange soda sits
in the draft beer glass.
Condensation drips down
to moisten the round
white bar coaster.

It's Saturday morning.
Grandpa with guys of his age
sit adjacent
down the long edge bar
reaching back
into the dark of the room.

They laugh and joke
free from the monitor
of wives and bosses.
They are more careful of their
language with young boys
in earshot.

These ancient men
survived two wars,
and have earned
their weekend freedoms,
while wives are home
or grocery shopping.

Early sunlight
warms our backs
through the neon display,
East End Taproom
OPEN.

Our feet barely reach
the barstool rungs.
My brother and I play
at a kind of manhood.

We are included
on the edge
of the gang.

The bartender's rules

allow us, even if
New Jersey law
says otherwise.

We are learning
the ways of men.

The First Bed

Queen of the ocean,
we sail across it, on it, in it,
splitting the crests of waves
as the cotton folds peel away before us,

your dark unfurled hair,
the masthead of our prow,
your eyes open toward the sky.
I, captured by them,
am pulled inside of you.

We navigate the shores, tacking
to distant islands of pleasure
in our linen sea, to drift
on for hours in our fascinated reflections
beneath the stars.

The slim lines of the ship we make
propelled by the engine of love.
We learn to maneuver together,
and chose our ports carelessly
in our lazy, loving days at sea.

Just Write

Plunk down the flour and butter; add as much salt and sugar as you dare.
You're not going to make any real dough at this anyway.

Roll out this lump however you want. If it gets too sticky, add more flour.
If it gets too sweet, add some sour; Maybe spaetzle it across the cutting board.

Feed it through the pasta maker or find your favorite cookie cutters.
Make strips with the knife you love to feel in the grip of your hand.

You may need a spoon of vinegar or fine wine.
It will knead you back if you give it the write kind of love.

Toss against the wall of your heart to see if it sticks.
Feed a bit to your friends and watch for their mouths to pucker.

Drop a surprise in the middle, something like Freud's dream
Or Janet Jackson's right breast.

Put yeast in and let it rise overnight in your lover's bed.
Let a cup sour for a week, so the starter blooms through your keyboard.

If you don't like it, chuck it out with the other failures in your life.
Start fresh and just write until your muse saddles you and rides you home.

Making Poetry at 3:09 a.m.

From the rare atmosphere lettered pots crash to the ground
surrounding me.

One after another
breaking to shards of words split
fragments juxtaposed.

I run from one to the next salvaging the
pieces of shattered ideas thrown from
dark sky.

Tiny broken vessels carry messages.
all in distant languages that insight babble
inside my brain. I run,
gather into to build my night-sky lesson
some kind of constellation.

More earthen pieces break the night
fall at my feet again. I bend myself over,
reach down, gather up,
even as shreds fall back
through my arms, land, break more.

As I rise, another crashes through my
head, splits my chest
breaks on the hard ground. I rake up phrases.
I pick up shattered ribs,
I sweep up scattered words.

I let the stinging cuts of paper and pottery
teach observation of pain without fear.

In the end I sit, wait for
dawn's light on me, to see

what has been created
in the dark struggle.