De die in diem: A grieving process (Original writing, Poetry, Prose).

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De die in diem:

A Grieving Process

by

Edith Newell-Beattie

A Creative Writing Project
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through English Literature and Creative Writing
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts in English Literature and Creative Writing at the
University of Windsor

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About the Title

While filling out forms for the office of Graduate Studies I got hung-up on the ever important question of what the title for my project would be. I had wanted something that would reflect the grieving process. I was considering using “How Do I Do This?” not because I really liked the title; rather it was just the question that boggled me. I couldn’t seem to get past it.

“How do I do this?”—from pant-leg tugging tot to phone-line mother of teens, it has been Dad who would hear my questions and advise me over and over again over the years. Death did not allow him to retire from my questioning.

I was flipping through a book of phrases and fables one day—don’t remember why—and my eye stopped on De die in diem, which is Latin and means, “From day to day continuously, until the business is complete.” I recognized the phrase as my title.

I was taken by it. Surely Dad was responsible. I’m not saying that he was titling my project for me but it certainly felt like he was guiding me to an answer for the prevalent question.

De die in diem, such a poetic phrase, I felt the comfort of my father as I said it over to myself. De die in diem, it felt consoling, spiritual, honest, and it certainly seemed to reflect the process. So from the spiritual guidance of my poet/mechanic/auto-body/woodworking/clock-making, grade six educated Dad came De die in diem.
Happy Thoughts
by: Herb Newell

I like to think of happy thoughts
As life goes passing by
Thoughts of kindness and of love
That never seem to die

I think of happy birds and bees
How joyously they sing
And young hearts drawn to love
In marry months of spring

I like to think of sunshine
As days may come and go
Of flowers and their beauty
When they are out in bloom

How happy most folks seem to be
When summer’s in its prime
They think of warmth and sunshine
Not of the winter time

But I do like the wintertime
When snow is on the ground
Because it comes from up above
To where I’m homeward bound

(Spring 1944)
Dedication

I leaned forward to kiss him goodbye
    not forever
    just for the evening
a spiral of a curl fell along-side my face
he reached his soft  but still oversized hand
held the curl  caressed the curl with his crooked fingers
his eyes lost to it  mouth agape
he caressed the curl

and I kissed him again
“I’m not leaving  I’ll see you tomorrow Dad”

(J. H. Newell, Aug 1, 1924—May 26, 2002)
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My committee:

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News-flash

The phone rang and a shotgun went off
inside my chest and my gut
must have been a shotgun
i heard the ring
felt the impact that threw me back
against a brick wall
felt the ripping
still feel the holes  riveting
and i want to die but i can’t die
and i think that you are alive
and i am dead
and i’d rather relive
my childhood in its entirety
re-take the trials that turned
the spirited child
docile
Upheaval

Dad
can you still hear me?
did you hear me last night?
i called you
from my living room
floor
where i was found
bathed
in the blood of Christ
after i had slipped
in red wine vomit
they say i lay there
in a pool of red
crying calling you
Attempted robbery

My dad is dead

and you put your fingers on my back   i feel them in my back   crawling under my skin   i squirm   my arms clamp—vise my head as if it could split   and your fingers are parasites

i feel your poverty   your uselessness   your need for me to stand   compose   be strong
you need me   to be who i was yesterday when i had a dad to comfort— to comfort me

your fingers slither my skin   searching   seeking something   you press them into my skin
try to get them into the knots   so you can grip and pull   draw the pain   my pain away

my head swings   curls fly wild and hands swipe   try to strike   your fingers   out of reach

Stop it!   i demand   this is between me and my dad   all that’s left   i push you away   keep you   at arms length

and you think me nuts   you want to take me away   to hospital   you say it’s too much
for me   i can’t handle it   i can’t take it   my dad dead

you can’t take it
Mourning mission

i don't fear
for you

—your dad wasn't only
the most popular
man in Tillsonburg—

don't doubt
you are free

—he was the most liked
the kindest
most honest man around—

don't feel a need
to guide you anywhere
through meditation
or prayer

—don't cry
he's with God now—

what's left?
Struck dumb

I'm sorry
I don't know what to say
they say
and go away

no one knows what to say
what to say
say nothing
there is
nothing
who can
sit in nothing?
take the lack of human voice?
face the unsmiling?
Life goes

—1—

Faces
of flowers
stare at me
daisies dyed
burgundy
for you
speaking
sympathy
for me
on this first day
of life goes
oak clock ticks
steady rhythm
the clock your hands
constructed and hung
level on my living
room wall when you
showed me how to adjust
brass pendulum
for time accuracy

now you’re outside
time and my clock
ticks to your setting
and i am struck
stuck
textured fabric of the couch against exposed skin and myself sinking into the fibers wishing to fuse with the couch blend into the pale floral print become one with its weave never leave because it is real
i see myself
eyes staring
straight ahead
as the scene
inches into
view

you

i place
one foot
in front
of the other
foot in front
of the other
foot in front
of the other
damned to
time's slivers
stuck in
moments
bearing
the life-altering aisle
aided by the man
you walked me to
husband gone to work
sons at school because life
goes

life goes

life goes

on
everything is
telling me
life goes
on

while i wonder
where you are
beyond time
i am without
ways

i don’t know
how to do this
have to learn
how to do this
how do i do this
Dad?

_De die in deim_
Doing dishes

Standing at the kitchen sink i wash dishes because dishes still have to be dirtied and cleaned and dirtied and i think about you on my mantelpiece

you
wrapped in brown paper addressed to Ostrander’s Funeral Home on Bidwell in Tillsonburg placed into—entrusted to—my hands

when i am at home left alone the first chance i get i work fingers over brown paper remove tape careful not to tear not a tear

a certificate of authenticity
These are the remains of...
how do i know? what do i know? i believe take up faith this is you what is left?
i open the box gray bits of white bone quickly close the box re-wrap the box
and you live in my head you thin frail hooked to oxygen eyes closed head back mouth agape

and me
knowing you’re dying not knowing you are dying afraid to ask go on not knowing just go on along

i go back to wiping dishes because dishes still have to be cleaned and dirtied and cleaned again and i hate
I hate that about dishes and i want to throw dishes through the window
and i want to scream so the whole world can hear me and i don’t want you on my mantelpiece and i want you on my mantelpiece and i have an impulse so strong i feel myself move away

i move away from wiping dishes rip brown paper savagely destroy the box tear through plastic i am on my knees in a cloud of powder a cloud of ashes
your ashes entrusted to my hands in my hands i rub your ashes all over my body scrape my skin with your bits of bone wash my face with you scrub you into my hair the curls you loved selfishly greedily i scour you into my pores through my sores so you’ll be with me stay with me—because i don’t have enough of you—haven’t had enough of you—will never have enough of you
“Happy thoughts”

“I like to think of springtime
as days may come and go
of flowers and their beauty
when they are out in bloom”

and the gardens are still growing
sun shining   birds singing
and spring is turning into summer
“summer’s in its prime”
children are running   laughing   playing
couples are making vows of love
and people have places to go
must have places to be
i keep hearing traffic
always hear traffic
traffic never stops
nothing stops
No reprieve

I never said it out loud I wrote it and wrote it and I wrote I think my dad is dying and I feel nothing

i tried to comfort—rubbed his back held hot cloths to his wrenching belly sooth pain i sat with him studied him lying sleeping thin frail a leash around his head hooked into his nose—oxygen still handsome skin soft gentle folds one blemish over left temple distinct jaw line blue-gray eyes open and close open and close and open again without raising his head his hand extended as if guided by a magnetic force his hand hovered over blankets smoothly it moved to mine

he held my hand “This is my little girl” he said caressing words i hardly remember hearing before in our house of restraint where love was unspoken and pride damning “This is my little girl” he said face relaxed and eyes brilliant and the words were energy that makes the world okay

he hugged my hand in his hand warmed my spirit with his smile his eyes and my little-girl-self rolled around in his esteem splashed the sin of pride on my face I felt it roll over my shoulders down my back I bathed

he slept i sat and listened while he spoke to his dead mother dead brother and sister whose name i carry i watched i listened and wondered never accepting thoughts

“I keep dreamin’ I’m somewhere else but I wake up an’ I’m still here” he said

i imagined a reunion at a family farm in a spiritual world but didn’t ask about that couldn’t ask about that i just felt sorry for him i felt bad for him poor Dad not even allowed to die
At least he's not suffering anymore

"I never wanted you t' see me like this Eed"

i want to be here but i will leave if you want me to i said not knowing how i could leave how i could stay away and you took my hand and i took your hand and i stayed

stayed until you stopped responding to my smiles stopped hunching your shoulders with your chin up and lips stretched to that oversized smile i stayed until your face became so serious that i had to turn my face away blink back tears hide pangs

then i left you for a party you left me when the party was over and it wasn't supposed to happen like that not like that we had the whole summer we were going to sit in the garden look at the flowers birds i was supposed to hold your hand help you feed you wipe your mouth wash you clean your bed-pan

I was supposed to take care of you until you felt like a burden to me until I wished you would just die and make it end so I could say at least he's not suffering anymore when i would really mean at least I'm not suffering any more
Click

A black and white photograph taken in 1966

a winged car in front of a rounded porch
   our car  our house

a little girl sits on the hood
  me  no more than three
blond curls frame a Shirley Temple face
saddle shoes  one crossed over the other

the little girl leans
  I lean toward
daddy
  leans onto his car
to his little girl
  he leans to me
his face shows in profile
  his eyes look to me
  I look to the camera

a black and white photograph
was taken in 1966
for him to hold on to

the day remains
imprinted in my head
Dad took me for a walk
hand in hand
we walked
he talked
i don’t remember words
i only remember sense
walking with my dad
wanting only to walk
with my dad

i hold a black and white photograph
taken in 1966  for him to hold on to
Then again

I’m drawn back. I’m two, three-years-old again and I’m with my dad and my brother, Stevie. I’ve missed my dad. My brother and I had to stay with Dad’s friends, Marvin and Betty, for a long time because Court had to decide if we could live with Dad. Marvin was nice. I didn’t think so at first but Betty was nice too. I just wanted my Daddy. I cried a lot and made it known that I was mad at Court—whose Court—I demanded—Court’s not my daddy, just tell Court I want my daddy—and I didn’t understand why Court got to decide if I could be with my dad. But I forgave Court, forgot about him, when Betty started packing my things and my brother’s things in suitcases because Daddy was coming to take us home.

I’m in a trailer and it’s summertime and my world is perfect with my dad and my big brother, who is only a year older than me, but that one year makes a difference, I look up to him. When we waited for Court Stevie didn’t cry and he said I shouldn’t cry because Daddy would make Court give us back, and he said it hurts Daddy’s feelings when I cry, and it hurts his feelings when I cry. And I cared but I cried anyway. And when Daddy’s supertime visits had to end, Stevie stayed, he lay beside me, behind me, with an arm over me, and I cried.

The trailer is filled with music. I think the music is a part of my dad because there’s always music when he’s around just like there’s always that fresh spicy smell that would come into Marvin and Betty’s house with him, and would linger, adding to my loneliness after he’d leave. But he never has to leave ever again so I think the music and the fresh spicy smell will be forever, and I am happy, happy. The whole world is alive in my Daddy’s trailer.
I'm all dressed up in a white sundress, frilly ankle-socks and I have shiny black shoes on. My shoes click when I tap them on the floor. I like the tapping. The tapping shoes make me feel pretty and so does the new dress Dad bought for me. I'm standing in front of my dad, who's fussing over my brother, and I'm singing for Dad to look at me.

Am I like a dancing girl, Daddy? I chant and clicked my feet. I am a child, smooth dancer. Dad gives me the tick of his tongue and I know I'm a good dancer.

"By golly, I think yea got 'er, Speedy. You're a dancin', girl alright." And his shoulders dance with me while his hands tie my brother's shoe.

Stevie is wearing a white tee-shirt top, with a set of three stripes that run across the chest—red in the middle of blue. He has blue shorts on. His shoes don't click like mine because boys wear soft, cloth-shoes with rubber bottoms so they can run fast because that's what boys like to do, and that's what Stevie likes too. His blond hair is short it doesn't need combing. Stevie's all finished and wants to play outside but our dad says no. He asks Stevie to wait. He has to do my hair and then he says that he needs to talk to us about something important.

Dad is brushing my hair. I am standing with my hands, one on each of his knees, as he brushes through my fine, blond curls. I don't fuss. I watch Stevie who's making two dinky-cars crash into each other. Stevie likes cars and he wants to know when we're going back to our own town, to our own house at the wrecking-yard: he wants to know if Dad is getting any more new-old cars soon.

Dad brushes my hair with kind, soft strokes, lets me pick the barrettes for the day, and his big callused, fingers work around the tiny clips and fine hair. I don't flinch. And I'm all ready.

It's a sunny day and Stevie and I want to play outside but Dad says no, he wants to talk to us, "Remember, there's somethin' important we need t' talk about."
Dad is telling us that we are going to meet a nice lady who bakes cookies, has a big house with a swing-set in the backyard and a son we can play with. As he speaks my belly starts fluttering, my dancing spirit stops dancing, and the sun shining in through the windows and screen door seems less bright, less inviting.

“She wants to be your new mom,” Dad says.

I don’t want to go to meet the ‘nice lady’ and my brother doesn’t want to go either. We both start crying. I cry because I only want to be with my dad. I don’t think about a mom—I have no memory of a mom, I just don’t like moms. And I don’t want one. But my brother does remember our mom and he wants her back and perhaps that’s why he cries.

When we were at Marvin and Betty’s he would tell me stories about the nice lady our mother was. She went away but she’s coming back, he told me, she promised—she’s coming back. He doesn’t know where she went or when she’s coming back. I don’t remember her. I only remember my brother remembering; telling me, she wears dresses, she’s pretty, she’s nice, and she’s coming back. He didn’t cry, he just kept talking about her and sitting by the window. Stevie never stops watching for her, waiting for her, but she doesn’t come back.

I don’t care about moms.

“She’s a nice lady and she wants to be your new mom,” Dad says and we cry more.

I tell him that we don’t need a mom—don’t want a mom. My brother and I are both on Dad’s lap. I’m standing on his lap, my arms around his neck—I just want you Daddy, don’t want a mommy—don’t need one.

“But daddys have to go to work an’ kids need a mommy to take care of ‘em,” he says. “She’s been baking cookies for you so we’re goin’ t’ visit. She’s a nice lady.”
I’m in the middle of the front bench-seat of the car because my brother likes the window and I can’t see out of it anyway. Dad’s plaid, wool blanket covers the seat so my dress doesn’t get dirty. The blanket is picky on my bare legs. I put my hands between the blanket and my legs but my hands are too small to protect my legs from the picks, so I put my feet on the blanket, knees up, and sit on my hands. I would like to stand up but my brother and I do not stand up in a moving car. Dad says bunnies often run on the road and if we are standing up he can’t stop fast enough to save the bunny because we would get badly hurt. My brother and I don’t want to kill bunnies so we don’t ever stand up in the car when it’s moving.

I think about the promise of cookies baking but I’m not convinced. *Skip-a-rope* comes on the radio. Dad winks at me and makes the sound louder. He is driving and singing, “Listen to the children while they play, ain’t it kinda funny what the children say, skip-a-rope.” I know he’s singing because I like the song about dads and little girls skipping and having fun, but I don’t care about songs right now.

Stevie’s body is stretched as tall as it can stretch. He’s looking out the window so I watch the puffs of white clouds against blue sky and I know that I don’t want a mom, and I have a brother to play with, and I like the swings at the park Dad takes us to, and I like the date cookies he buys at the store.

Dad announces, “this’d be it,” as he pulls into the drive.

I stand on the seat and see a green house with a round porch. A dark-haired boy is sitting on a chair and his mother comes out of the house. Dad starts getting out of the car and I scurry to him before he can close the door. When he bends toward me my arms
lock around his neck, my legs wrap to his waist and I press my nose into his fresh spicy smell.

Dad is wearing me like a vest as he walks around the car to let my brother out through the passenger door. The lady, whom I don’t want or need, comes over to us singing words of high praise.

Her voice has a piercing pitch as she coos—what a doll, what a beautiful little girl; oh she’s so lovely, Herb.

She puts her hands out to take me. I squeeze onto my dad but her big hands are already too tight around my waist. I’m scared. I don’t like her coos and her big hands. I cling tight to my dad and she tightens her too-tight grip and she pulls my waist telling Dad that I am fine when I am not fine at all.

She is mean—I feel her meanness—I hear it in her cooing voice. And I know that she doesn’t really like me at all, and I know that I don’t like her. But she’s squeezing me in her arms now.

You’re upsetting your brother, her nice voice says, but her voice reminds me of those big black birds that were squawking, hitting each other with their wings, trying to peck a bird that was hurt on the road in front of our house before Dad shooed them away and brought the little bird into the barn until it could fly.

You don’t want to upset your brother, her voice says as her cruel fingers pinch my leg.

My crying changes pitch. Dad comes to me. I reach my arms to him, for him to take me back. He is reaching toward me.
It's okay Herb, she says—I pinched her, she tells him—an accident, she insists. She takes my face in her hand, makes me look at her, and says, see what you brought on yourself?—all that fussing, hard to hold.

I see her eyes.

Stevie is clinging to Dad and I'm stretching out arms—reaching, wet-faced, Dad's careful brushing gone to muddle, hair is stuck to my face, stuck to tears. I'm stretching my body toward Dad—he extends an arm to take me—I am reduced to sniffles of hope that I'm going to get back to my daddy. My daddy is strong. He always carries Stevie and me at the same time. But the woman cuts any hope sharp. She denies us.

As if the authority on children she says, Your arms are full, Herb. She's fine. I can take her.

And she did. She took me.
Blowing kisses

Your new wife taught me to blow kisses I stood on the oak staircase that bent up around to the landing that led to my new white on white bedroom I stood on the step in a linen nightgown blond curls framed baby-fat cheeks

I was blowing kisses down to you were blowing kisses up to me you smiled I cried not because I didn’t want to go to bed I cried because I couldn’t feel kisses in a wind of breath

your new wife stood over me cooed how cute as she ordered distance teaching me to blow kisses I’d never heard of such silliness before blowing kisses I wanted wrap my little self to you and be kissed I cried because we were blowing ——
A walk in the park

People jogging biking roller-blading sweat-wet clothes streaking past life to prolong life returning home to count calories carbs protein potassium rhyacine niacin glucose

and i wonder what it is everyone is working so hard to hold on to the familiar? this existence? this race to pay bills on time? credit relayed in sums?

and i think of you relieved and i know you are there somewhere i feel you i hear you still advising i still see you

in my garden this morning when i was uprooting plants moving them from front to back splitting them away from parent making them stand alone on their own i began to worry that the new ground was too hard the roots might strangle in clay “dig in-ground flower pots” you said so my peat moss and bag of soil would serve

i know you are somewhere and i want to be there too with you where i imagine numbers to be obsolete where people in the park are not sweat-wet not streaking past i want to be with you where people are

not gasping grasping
Another night

Two thirty
three four a.m.
eyes sting words blur
can't read another string
close the book shut the light

i hug my waist
squeeze belly
hold it together
or it will spill
wide open
splatter queasy
anguish all over
sheets cocoon
my fetal body
hold me together
quiet quivering

i close my eyes
and you live
your face
my belly's
knotted pain
your heaving dryness
my mourning

i open my eyes
to the open window
to the upper branches
of the back-lit tree
frame outside in

and there is nothing else
just you and me
and the back-lit tree
and the sounds of nature
crickets tree beetles
and my unquiet mind
one
Small i

i feel very small
like a child
abandoned
turned orphan

but i am not a child
not abandoned
you have died
and i’ve become

a balloon

strings

cut

away

floating

through

space

place

sensing

prickles

prickles
“Happy thoughts”
II

Summer’s prime is past
children with book bags
dressed crisp
race off playful laughing
excited in spite of their belief
in a dislike for school

the gardens are growing
chrysanthemums display
fall’s finally

trees start the autumn fall
squirrel scurry for nuts
birds sing jays
and cardinals nest
to stay others in a vee
fly away

and people have fallen in love
people are still falling in
every one and every thing
is into swing

i waver
Little changes

Hearing the laughter
of children
i look out back
they’ve piled leaves
enticed a dog
to a chase
they run
he follows
they jump
leaves fly
float down
children laugh
in the fall
little changes
De die in diem

De die in diem  de die in diem  i go on  pushing
myself up steep slopes though i keep sliding back
towards where sickly fathers sleep  i push up slope
do all I would do if you didn’t died  but you are dead
breathe went out of  my doings
became flat lines

but i go on  along from day to day and another day
flows into another night and night to day  today still
with a thousand needles in my feet  flashing flaring
through nerves  i push along up slopes so steep without
sleep i push continuous until the business is complete
the process never ending

another day  pricks and stabs into another day  to night
to day  day night day

De die in diem  time is no friend  too fast too slow  slow
fast  can’t get the flow right  and what is this?
this business  this trick of time and place that folds lives
one into the other just to tear the bond away and say
time heals?
Friendly advice

I toss my cigarette
watch it
roll and burn
and see her
morning-fresh make-up face
telling me
my dad wouldn’t want me
like this
can’t ruin my life
she says

stale
stench
alcoholic
words
Your mother muse

I didn’t know you wrote
until I was a young teen on closet-cleaning assignment
snooping through boxes I had no business in and found a paper aged yellow

there in the closet body curled like a fetus page unfolded I held your “Happy Thoughts” in my hands felt something open in my chest while I read your words

I read them and read them again looking away and looking back until I knew every word until your poem became part of me and like a spy I returned the folds replaced the yellow page precisely so no one would know

my theft was silent
until I was twenty and painted your poem on yellow cloth as a gift because I didn’t have money to do any better

“By golly you done that?” you said admiring the garden-flower-border that dwindled down to snow your words mimicked in paint “wrote that when I was ‘bout your age wrote for my mother” you said

I thought about how you stayed on the farm for your mother cured needs and farmyard deeds and how she left

and now I am left
with your words and an image of how you held her in your arms as her lungs deflated you lost your poetry sat there silent held her lifeless body to your chest rocked her cried for her and lost your words never wrote again
The undertow

"...a man’s life dies as a commotion
in a still pool dies, in little waves,
spreading and growing back to stillness."
(John Steinbeck, To a God Unknown)

—1—

Came the splash
the pour swirls
whirls of water
a boulder plummeted
through a crystal pool
of calm

as if forced by gravity
you were pulled
to murky underside
a shadowy existence
beyond this place
space

and I tied to you
am tossed around
dizzy
in an undertow
twirled whirled
and ordered forward
on with life

recent past
mixed mingled
in muddy water
a present
undefined
our history lost
to a quiet sickbed
and an old man
posed as you
breaking the surface
I look for your hands
try to bring them back
hold them
to memory
“What can yea do?”

My dad was Ellis Henry’s Volkswagon Dealership by day and he was Herb’s Auto-Body & Repair by night everybody brought their car to Dad they said he was reasonable and he was “man don’t have money what can yea do?” I’d hear him say to my stepmother “didn’t cost me a thing but a bit a time guy needs his car in workin’ order t’ make money what can yea do?”

it’s not a wonder I have high blood pressure not a wonder my stepmother would shout her arms flailing arms always flailing

for a long time I didn’t know what high blood pressure was but she kept saying it and saying something about nerves which I understood even less but I did figure out what high blood pressure meant of course I reasoned that it must be what happens when her arms would start flailing and all of her blood right from the tips of her toes would get pumped up into her face just before she’d start to shout the house rattling damning Bill John Ed Fred Chuck Bruce Al Sal Sole by God

and the constant ringing in my ears to this day could be from her needle-sharp-pitch-of-a-voice over all of the years of Dad humming “well what can yea do?”
In the mud-room

I was thieving time standing in the mud-room with my dad it was one of the times we were alone there weren’t many and I don’t know how it happened where my stepmother was it was peculiar she was always around always there even when I didn’t know it she’d just appear break the clear quiet sometimes I’d feel the smack across my ear before I’d even hear her presence as heavy as she was

she was always everywhere knew everything every leaf of thought that curled through my brain she knew she had eyes in back of her head powerful eyes that could see through the net that hugged her head and held artificial curls in place and guilty I could have used such eyes as I stood by stealing time wondering from where she’d pop order and strike

Dad had a small motor in his hands it was seized I looked to his working hands—the only hard thing about him watched them pry at gears try to work the motor free it up I looked to the softness of his face and had to have something to map the stolen treasure of time tuck it away for safe keeping that day at school I was called on to read my story aloud no marks off for spelling perhaps this once I thought I could get a ‘B’

my voice didn’t heighten with excitement didn’t sing as many may it was the quiet voice of a thief and there was nothing my stepmother hated more than a goddamned thief or if there was it was a goddamned liar quietly I told my dad about my story told him I did good mine was the best story

I had his attention “yea done good did yea?” yeah dad I done real good my teacher said I done good too “that’s good Speedy” he said cause that’s what he called me “Speedy Edie” or in a playful mood he’d call me “that Speeder Eeder Kid” said I was a hard one to keep up with said he was always chasing after me when I was little he said I “was a spirited one all right” but being “spirited” was not a part of my memory when I was in—I don’t remember which first or second year—grade three and stealing moments hoping my stepmother wouldn’t spring from the nowhere and order me in to potato-peeling dish-washing diaper-changing or some other useful skill training

“glad yea done good” dad said his voice soft as the skin on his face and I was sure I saw diamond light flash in his eyes and it was the sight not the story that lifted me from the mud-room floor “but be sure to remember” he said “pride is a man’s downfall” and I was only in first or second year grade three but I knew ‘man’ meant me
A lesson

In grade school it was grade three when they sat us all down and taught us about something called “communism.”

They brainwash people they said and I sat there in all of my ignorance and imagined these monstrous people with flag-wrapped arms cutting people’s heads removing their brain and with a stiff brush and hot hot water that turns your skin red they scrubbed the way my mother—who’s not really my mother—did to my body after the thing that happened to me happened.

The people are not allowed to own a Bible or praise God they told us and I thought about my dad who didn’t want to praise God anymore because his father who was his father but was a Brother of Christ preacher first—whatever that meant—made him read the Bible behind a locked door everyday. I didn’t have to read the Bible because Dad said “judge not” and he said to “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” were the lines to remember and always to practice and he said I could pray any time any place.

They said that the people didn’t know freedom like we do and I didn’t know what kind of freedom they knew but I thought of the mother—who wasn’t my mother—and how she would scream that life is not a white picket fence with a swing-set in the back yard there are no guarantees just taxes and death nothing is free I might as well learn it right now.

I failed grade three.
A haunting

—1—

My dad was never good enough
in his own mind
mistakes shadow goodness
"drank too much"

he was a mechanic by day
did auto-body by night
he was a wood-worker
a workaholic

he couldn’t imagine
his daughter’s cries
locked little rag-doll
quiet by threats
lost will
to legs
pried
penetrated
pumped
repeatedly
in daytime home
attic
familiar silhouette
but whose?
lost
re-memory
toys mind
cries
sound in years
of motherhood
when fear
sets to panic
for children born to her
arms too weak

she breaks silence
anxiously sorts visions
seeks answers
locked in mind's vault

but the child-mother suffers
as trouble-maker
self-centered
attention seeking
indignant crotch talker
willing to drag any one through the mud
stepmother demands silence
Dad learned late
    after he retired from cars
he took up the hobby
    of clock making

i learned late
    as i sat in hospital
    before his death
"questioned every one" he said
he never stopped prying
spent fifteen years probing
people who knew
pre-school me

it haunted him
    i haunted him
Conversation with self

Self you’re like one of those old cars before they found their way into Dad’s hands

temperamental starter would-be driver prays turns key in ignition gets friction rumbles
of resistance chock hold release pump pedal repeat caress dashboard slow to go

or bad battery turn the key and get click juice low flag down another clamp onto
posts turn key give gas let run lent charge sparks when boosting along on borrowed
energy mustn’t stop

timing belt crossings of strings meshed in rubber band crankshaft to distributor
clocked sequence of motor worn thin sluggish car bucks jolts alone rough ride it spits
backfires threatens stall out

sighing motor moody some days runs reasonable the next whines grinds leaves
operator in appeals constant dashboard caressing hold hard to hope pleads get me to
work get me home from work make it through this day and another day to payday
sputter along

but you’re not one of those old cars you’re out of Dad’s hands
of Dad’s hands

40
Yellow

“You are my sunshine” still I hear you back there singing “my only sunshine” your singing voice made my little-girl-self feel sunny warm “you make me happy” when I closed my eyes at night I saw yellow “when skys are gray” as if my face were turned up to a mid-day sky in July “you never know dear” and I am sure I shone Dad

and I still hear your singing voice back there telling me to “keep on the sunny side” and I have tried “always on the sunny side” as a schoolgirl I took great care to walk on the sunny side of the street and I have smiled bright in spite of childhood hell so bright that no one had a clue not even you and I have embraced yellow

you sang me yellow I still hear you singing and I am still trying still smiling still embracing yellow
A tapestry of life after life

---1---

When you die do you get to see the whole work of art every little thread and weave that is your life done up in a brilliant tapestry?

see your father there? are all of the threads dark and dull? do they twist twirl knot and intertwine to make him?

are you absolved from hitting your father? absolved from the closed fist snap when you were a boy ordered into the rays of morning light that seep through barn-board cracks embroidered cracks slashed black when your father’s horse-whip cut through and into you when he made your sister watch

are you absolved for stretching the wood ladder up to the yellow lamp light of your sister’s bedroom window so she could slip out in silk stocking and home-spun dress into star lit night to walk the dirt road to join a young man in a dance?

is your father absolved?

are all the answers portrayed displayed for understanding? does the stone-face man still stand tall at embroidered pulpit still dressed in black casting preacher shadows over scenes beyond years of life that are his?
do you understand your preacher
father? do you understand his faith?
his love for a God
who did not supply
enough love for a son?

am i absolved? for getting excited
for being glad you hit him
for telling you you shouldn’t feel
bad because i would have hit him too
because i still wanted to hit him
for scarring you beyond your skin
scarring me beyond mine
see all the threads that are me
shades of yellow pink and blue
baby-fine threads that make
the curly-haired chubby-cheeked
wide-eyed little girl
the handful-of-a-child who
had a mind-of-her-own who
curled away into her mind
at the pushing slapping hands
at the violent mouth
of your wife

see the many faces
of your wife? the face
that cooed in front of you
the smiling kissing faces
and then faces of coarse
cord you’ve never seen
before? pinched to scowl
flat brown eyes the face
that threatened the child
who could and would take
a beating but could not manage
the black phone-in-hand-
threat of being sent
away to Children’s Aid…
ever see daddy again?

see how I cried?
fell on my knees
begged?
see how scary-good
I became?

and on your busy canvas
amongst the scenes do you
see fine silk stitching of
the little daddy-girl white heart?
see it sewn on my chest?
a heart with reaching
reaching little hands
that get cut
off
the little white heart
never stops reaching
doesn’t sling mud
because workaholic
eyes didn’t
see
counselor’s piercing eyes
that try to gaze through
and my DNA mother
knitting denial darting blame
prying at the heart
with rusty words
try to bend it taunt it to
anger your own face is there
telling me you lack
as a father and still the little
hands never stop
reaching
and somewhere in all of the shades
of light and shadow and bright
and dark through all of the years'
stitching and weavings see
my little Bobby? "the spittin'
image of his mother"
at two running across black
and white check floor cutting
through conversation?
see him challenge head up
small hands to waist spouting
off tunes of what he knows to be?

see my kid-gloves?
soft wool
uneven stitches
stretched out shape

am I sewn in a glow
struck with understanding
after your streaks of words
wipe away blurs when you asked
if I believe "spare the rod
spoil the child" and I bolt out
no the rod rots the child
and you told me about your
father in the barn
told me you believed
thought he was right
and you were weak
you who hit him
who couldn't
hit me

my face in profile forever rests
to your chest brown threads spin
mature curls that caress your
face you who were responsible
who taught me to be mindful

as the scene swirls along
see how the shades that make
me fade to pale disappointment
when I couldn't draw the picture
sketch the difference when you
wouldn’t let me smooth
curves of turns that you
drew heavy black and rigid
you refused to view the image
of you I carry

do you see it now?
Cheek

This morning I sat on a front bench-seat—usually I sit at the back but in the newer buses those seats are higher and they cut-off circulation in the legs of shorter people like myself. So this morning I sat on a front bench seat—my back to the window.

At a main stop downtown a group of people, depending on their mood or their purpose, scurried or moseyed aboard the bus; some of the former annoyed by the latter. A large man, one of the latter, shuffling his weight in dirty, tattered jeans and a jacket that resembled something a security guard might wear, caused some commotion. People sighed in complaint but the man went no faster. As he boarded he talked to an unknown person. Perhaps that was part of the disturbance. The greasiness of his brown hair made it appear darker than it probably was, it was shaggy and had taken on bangs that fell heavy in front of his pockmarked face, which was also concealed by five o’clock shadow. He sat down beside me.

The man continued to talk and because no one accompanied him I wondered if he was responding to a voice that only existed inside of his head. But that wasn’t the case. He spoke to the people around him. Once seated he spoke to those who sat across the way. The persons spoken to did not acknowledge that the lonely man speaks.

He turned his attention to me and said, I’m goin’ ta the nursin’ home but then I’m goin’ back downtown. Just goin’ ta get my cheque first.

I smiled and nodded as to not disregard him completely but then I too had tried to look blank. I stared straight ahead.

They have ta give it to me, don’t they?

I looked at advertisements, which seemed to be there for the purpose of tuning out others. I questioned why I tried to close the man off.

They do, right? They have ta give me my money.
In my mind I questioned people’s ability to ignore the man. *How do they do it? why can I not? and why do I want to?* I thought of my father who would claim to be better than no man—he’d never let a man speak to the side of his head?

Can’t keep it, can they? It’s a government cheque.

I turned my head and faced the man. His dark eyes conveyed no threat. Just confusion. He said, It’s my cheque—government cheque. They can’t keep it, can they?

I smiled still thinking of my father. I don’t know, I said.

It’s my cheque, he said.

Then I don’t think they can. I still smiled but wondered what his situation was, what he thought I represented, what importance he would place in my words and how it was possible that I could make his situation worse if I choose the wrong ones. I wondered if that was why the people stayed silent.

I’m movin’ out-a-there in December anyway, you know that? I’m movin’ out, he said.

I didn’t affirm nor encourage, Are you? I said.

Yep, he said, be out of there the first of December—can’t keep my cheque, can they?

I don’t know how it works, I said as I pictured myself telling him that they can’t keep his check and him going to the nursing home making demands because the nice lady with the leather case said—

Are you on disability? he said.

No, I said realizing how far-fetched my vision was.

How would you like to live in a nursin’ home? How would you like that? he said.

No, I said, not wanting to lie, I don’t think I’d like that.

You wouldn’t like that? he said with a heightened tone and inquisitive eyes.

No. I don’t think I would, I said.

No. You wouldn’t like that, he said.
Then there was a brief silence in which a plan came to his mind and suddenly out of his mouth, I could go ta Toronto! They issue them there—can’t go ta London—could go ta Toronto if they don’t give me my cheque.

I only smiled and thought how sad it seemed. I pegged the man to be in his fifties.

Could go ta Toronto, can’t I? he said.

I’m not sure. I said, as I thought of his means. How could he get to Toronto and back? I thought of my own visits to Toronto—the people sleeping on Yonge Street with large pieces of cardboard or dirty blankets to serve as their shelter. Had they also been seeking a cheque?

Well, if they don’t give me my cheque I could call the law—the law will make them give me my cheque. Right? The man’s dark eyes went bright as if he’d found his answer. The law. They’ll do it. Right?

I don’t know about that, I said. I pictured a scene of him making demands, his frustration mounting and feelings of betrayal being the outcome.

The man, so sure that his idea was good, asked the people who sat across the way. One by one he asked, but stone faces possessed blank eyes and said nothing.

Finally—a man down the line said, I guess they would? And I looked at the man who had spoken—his smile was bright against dark skin. I smiled too.

Then the man beside me, with a controlled, jerky laugh said, I’m funny, hey?—funny-funny-funny, hey?

I didn’t know how to answer with words. If I had said no he might have been insulted. Perhaps he liked being funny. If I said yes he might have thought we were laughing at him. I only acknowledged that I’d heard his words and said nothing.

Can’t do anything when you’re broke, can you? he said, quickly losing the humor.

Very little, I said, reconsidering my own sense of what it was to be broke. And I felt a pang as I projected my idea of quality life onto the man who, it seemed, would never have more.
It's the law. They have ta give me my cheque—it's a government cheque. Don't they?

The bell rang. It was my stop. Good luck, I said. I stepped off of the bus with other students. We walked to the curb and awaited the stoplight. A girl to my left giggled. I figured she giggled because she saw the irony.

You better keep that one, she said, He's a winner—a real sweetie.

A girl to my right said, That's nothing—that's just one of them.

Our light turned green.
Albert

Albert smoked cigarette butts drank Vermouth wore a captain's hat and slept on park benches he prized a shopping cart borrowed from A&P and all day he'd walk collecting broken taillights tailpipes works of wood discarded appliances thrown away

he'd push his cart to London street show Dad his wares and Dad would buy the wooden pieces to recycle into new buy old appliances "for parts," he'd tell his wife and she would sneer and call him fool buying garbage

Albert's face began to swell "abscess?" it grew bullfrog-like Dad coaxed him into car and to hospital made Albert family by fall cared for his appointments his meds and his vermouth because "there ain't no sense denying him now" Dad would say and the nurse agreed

Albert left our house in the spring captain's hat on his chest an orchid on his coffin
An enquiry

He took a pause
after my questioning
sat in driver’s seat
scratching his head
his elastic face contracting
expanding contrasting
a cartoon image
the way he’d do
to mask dismay

“you seen too much
for your years
I’m sorry ‘bout that”
his said to me 11/
12 sitting perplexed
in passenger seat asking

doesn’t Jay love Debbie any more?
he doesn’t seem to and if he does
why was he in the tent with Betty?
I like Betty but I like Debbie too
don’t think I like Jay anymore
he leaves Debbie and drinks beer
with Betty and I don’t
understand if you’re married
you’re not suppose to
if you don’t love the person
anymore you’re not suppose to stay
married are you dad?
Hands measure meant

Jim was the first man
to call me lady
strong body
arms hug the world away
eyes blue bright

I brought him home
my eighteenth summer
    love ‘n’ bubbles

“nice enough fellow alright”
    but not for me
    Dad said

excitement
drained
from face

shoulders
dropped

my belly became
an unlatched trapdoor
that could fall open
spill contents

“hands too soft”
    he said

my face turned
eyes fixed
to his hands
    flat palms
    long gone
    scarred maps
    thick aged-leather
    stained tools
    over used
rough hands that
tousled curls
from carefree blond
to troubled brown
that avoids tangles
his hands
employed meaning

no man could meet the measure
not one could be good enough
   not for his daughter
   not for me

I hugged him
kissed his cheek
I love you too Dad
and was gone
on with life
Yellow fades

Sun is in the trees
shades of yellow
sway autumn breeze
carpet ground soft
yellow fades away
to brown crunch
crumble under
feet reduced
to runners
and decay
An Indian summer day

Baby sleeping
in crib another
cradled in belly
I sat on the porch
breathing spirits
filled my lungs
with fresh air
loving life
I wrote the day
recorded it dropped
it into mail passed
it on along to Aunt
Edie never knowing
it would mark the last
of our lives shared
My son said

You know what really sucks Mom?
I have to go through this someday
too don’t know what I’d do
if anything happened to you
what would I do?
The question remains

I expressed
the empty-bowl
for a belly forecast
of-losing-him-feeling
years ago fearing
the day he wouldn’t be

“shouldn’t fear
be happy for me
you've Irish blood
party celebrate”

he talked of death
as a relation
“life’s sister sad
she’s named dark
sound of dread sets
yea t’ fear her”

he talked of death
as life extended
free soul
unrestrained

Irish blood thick
heavy in my head
yet to party
still pulsing
selfish grief
Christmas sixteen years past

He doesn't appear in the Christmas morning photograph taken in his house at arch from living room to kitchen where my husband leans on one knee arm around our son then two wearing new sleepers red and blue a hockey boy crest at chest

my husband's gift—a triple-dot Bringham pipe bends over lower lip Dad's fedora on his head our son in toddler mimic grandpa's pipe in his mouth fedoras on his head tinny white teeth hold pipe that dips over lower lip stretched up smile stuffs cheeks to puff under eyes that shine in blue bright mischief

he doesn't appear in the Christmas morning photograph taken in his house yet he appears in the moment snapped frozen on gloss
Christmas presence:
Minnie (Gee) Newell (1885-1956)

My dad didn’t talk about his childhood, “Weren’t much t’ talk about,” so the stories are few and the details sparse. But after gifts are wrapped and stockings stuffed, and I’m sitting back with a drink, holding this Christmas ornament in my hand, tracing its letters with my finger, still anticipating the excitement of my kids—who aren’t really kids anymore but are young men—I’m draw back to that first Christmas Eve as a mother.

We were still at my dad’s—had been there since October because I wasn’t going to have this baby hundreds of miles away in Thunderbay with no family around, without my dad—so there we were, in Tillsonburg on through ‘baby’s first Christmas.’

Little Charlie slept, content in his bassinet by the Christmas tree and I was sitting in my dad’s chair still rocking as if the baby lay to my breast. My face must have told on me, as it often did and maybe does, because when Dad came into the room responses to thoughts that were in my head came out of his mouth.

“Feedin’ int’ it, are yea?” he said, “Yea think little Charlie cares what’s under that there tree.”

And Dad was right. I knew Baby Charlie didn’t know what Christmas was. But I did. And I was wanting something spectacular, bells and banners, because this was ‘baby’s first’ and it wasn’t just any baby, it was the most beautiful, most precious baby to ever come along—and that wasn’t because it was my baby, it was just so—and however it happened that this wonder-of-life was born to me, was beyond me; but he was born to me so I was going to be the best mother ever—prove I deserved such perfection and wasn’t I failing fast if I couldn’t produce bells ‘n’ banners for ‘baby’s first Christmas’? I
didn’t say all of that to my dad though. I didn’t understand how he knew me so well, but I didn’t have to say anything.

“It don’t make yea a bad mother yea know. There’s too much good stuff in yea t’ be a bad mother.” And he didn’t even sit down. After working all day and into the evening he stood there and told me about the secret Christmas of his boyhood.

It wasn’t a long story. Dad couldn’t afford a long telling. But the story has lived in my head for eighteen years and joined with other snippets, which serve to fill in the holes of the telling.

My grandfather, George, was a Minister of an iron-fisted religion called Brethren of Christ. Christmas was against the faith and so was card playing, and dancing and singing and anything that could possibly be thought of as an indulgence. Making eye contact with anyone from outside of the faith was also prohibited. It was okay to talk to outsiders on a superficial basis; after all, a certain amount of communication was necessary for subsistence. It just wasn’t okay to look at the people—who were supplying the flour to make the bread—in the face, the eyes. It was as if the believer would be tainted, tempted beyond salvation, by what might be seen when they looked to the soulful windows of the other.

For a long time I had a problem looking people in the face. When I grew up we didn’t practice the religion that was George’s but we were a look-away family. The rule had lived on without awareness. But I did make the connection and I remember questioning the integrity of such a rule. It seemed unfair; my grandfather had an unequal advantage—he had a glass eye.
Before George became a husband, father, farmer, and a preacher, he was an accountant. In his early thirties he took a job in a local pitchfork factory. That's where he met Minnie. She was a year his senior and was the factory secretary. What the money-man was doing in the back—in the working area of the factory—is beyond what I know of the story. But he was back there at the vats of hot pitch when it splattered up and dove to his eye. It was burned beyond repair. George only had vision in his right eye from then on. Perhaps the no-eye-contact-rule was a part of his attraction to the faith.

Most living was against the faith, which would explain why family photos were blemishes of stone faces. When I first saw my grandparents' wedding picture I thought they must have always been old. I questioned if they were sad because they were always old. I was answered with a general comment of no and something about the people back then being very serious.

It seemed the faith was serious business so my preacher grandfather did not tolerate much living at all. It was a wrathful God that he worked for. He didn't have a problem interpreting The Word or judging and prosecuting trespassers of the faith, with the heaviest sentences reserved for members of his-own household.

For my grandmother, it seems Christmas was a bit of upper Eden. She spent lone-hours knitting hats, scarves, mittens, and socks—three pairs each; she stashed luxuries like oranges, cinnamon sticks and liquorice whips, and would sneak three bottles of soda pop, one at a time, into her burlap grocery bag, into the house, and up the attic stairs. And in keeping with what she knew of the holiday, she would stuff the goodies in the socks, hats and mittens that would become well worn as the winter season passed.
On Christmas morning, while her husband was out milking cows, Minnie would tip-toe three children to the attic and watch them indulge in flavours of the season. My dad was her baby and he ate candy and drank soda pop once a year until Minnie got caught and Christmas became too much of a threat to her children. At that time she stopped the indulgence, stopped defying her husband until after he was dead.

But while it lasted Grandma Minnie would divert Grandpa George’s attention by pointing out something that would spark his musing, required his preaching or his prayers—so she could slip a bottle of soda-pop through the check-out and into her grocery bag. I can easily imagine Minnie’s small stature, bundled in a long, gray coat, moseying on past George—likely passing on his left—and proceeding to the horse-and-carriage undetected. She would sit there with prayers dancing in her head, whirling between asking God’s forgiveness for her deception and His help for the man caught in George’s attention—the poor soul who would never know how he aided Minnie in supplying three children with Christmas.

Minnie would sit in the carriage with her home-sewn bag bundled on her lap, not like a treasure, but nonchalantly—the way she held it all year long just so it would be seen as routine during this wonderful, treasurable time of the year. The soda-pop smuggler would sit cool and patiently while waiting for her husband who tended God’s ever-important work, as any preacher’s wife would. And behind the eyes that had learned to reveal nothing, Minnie would fantasize about the Christmas morning excitement of her children. She would envision their smiling eyes and lips that only narrowed long enough to take another bite of candy or sip of soda-pop and she would
almost smile while envisioning how their little noses would wrinkle, tickled by soda-pop fizz.

I've come to think how Grandma Minnie might have thought of the indulgence as hers because the children's quiet excitement was such a gift to her. And with everything that went on behind her blue eyes, she would sit stern and narrow-lipped while waiting for her preacher husband.

I've never met Minnie but I'm sure I saw her in my dad many times, but her presence was most vivid that night when he gave me the story and the hand-painted ornament that reads, 1984, Mother's First Christmas.
A germination of thought

the living
miss the dead
live
Walking

I wonder about
the space
where you are

sometimes
I think you are right there
just beyond my fingertips
when I stretch arms up

so I fling arm
over my head
stretch out hands
extend fingertips
as if to touch you

beyond

my chest becomes light
seems to open like the sky
as clouds clear for sun
warmth
comfort
I think it’s you

smiling

in my chest
Thinning Irish blood

I found my singing voice
I dance and sing *Daddy Frank*
with friends
we point beer-bottles to the sky
clap them
and friends who have never known you
all know you
well
their feet are in Tom-Stoppin’ time
singing songs they’d never play
they live the best of my girlhood
when you and I danced  country
star bright sky firelight night balm
dew  grass and yeeeh-haaaw
I am
forever  your daughter
crowned the fedora queen
self appointed
assume position
arms swing  body sways
feet stomp in tune
I dance with bottled sunshine
and friends
dance for your life
and mine
Winter wonders
spring thoughts

—I—

Ice-sickles
hang on
front porch
glisten in sun
light drips
fall away
becomes one
with what
lays beyond
as if never there
ever
under autumn's blanket
& winter's plush duvet
beds lay waiting
through frost
for thaw

garden's death
an illusion
deep roots
hold life
promise
colours
return
My father's never spoken words
  borrowed from a Cree daughter*

I am taken back to hospital white to the last meal of his life
as he tried to force food back  I hear his gagging

  I lived for you
  a Cree woman said to her daughter

and I am drawn to his hands

  I lived for you

I am before his Irish eyes that would speak when
his shoulders rise and hunch to hug the whole space between us

  It's O.K. my girl
  a Cree woman said to her daughter

his hand embraced my hand

  It's O.K. my girl

and I hear the tick of his tongue as his eye winks and head nods right to left
communicating the unspeakable word that could be every man's downfall

  I lived for you
  a Cree woman said
  It's O.K. my girl

I am back there sitting on his bed in the quiet when a nurse walks in and he speaks
"Did I tell yea this here's my daughter—goes to the university there in Windsor
gonna be one of those big-name writers someday"

  live my daughter

* Inspired by the words of Marilyn Dumont.
Time

Ticks tricks
pushes pulls
taunts haunts
twists
turns
us
into fools
who cry
From caterpillars to cocoons

i feel like crying because Dr. Whitney had said “Good cannot come from evil because if good could come from evil it would negate the existence of evil and it is a fact evil does exist”

and I had to believe opposite I had to believe good could come from evil because if good couldn’t come from evil I have endured too much meaningless experience too much that goes no where does nothing it would mean I was just born to be penetrated by evil f**ked when I didn’t want to be when I didn’t have choice long before I even knew the word it would mean I could do nothing but carry the pain fester rot in it

in all due respect I argued against Dr. Whitney I said that when a butterfly emerges from a cocoon the materialization of the butterfly does not negate the fact that the caterpillar exists any more than the emergence of good would negate the existence of evil

and Dr Whitney liked my argument

but now i want to cry because sometime we don’t see a butterfly emerge sometimes the cocoon brings forth a moth and it eats holes in our sweater our most favourite sweater maybe our only sweater and it leaves us cold through the winter and i hadn’t thought about that i hadn’t thought about that i didn’t want to think about that i couldn’t
When i was a child

I could get on a swing push
pull chains with my arms pump
air aim my little big toe
poke holes in the clouds
open the sky

I could fly

out of my body bond
my little self to the ceiling
to attic beams I could hide
in the seam of existence
experience no evil

I could soar

through the streets
while my body would sleep
visit spirits old kind and wise
lay my mind dormant
for seasons of life

I was skilled

but that is then
when i was a child
not yet five and all just
was without words
beyond reason
What i could hardly tell myself
(written for Jim)

My dad is here  i told you  i don’t know how couples can be intimate with parent flying
around spirit free from body roaming unseen and seeing
i ask you not to touch me  respectful of mourning  you abstain but remain at my reach

still i hear my dad

“could ‘ave been Jay” he said “you never did like ‘im  I questioned every one but Jay
he moved away went West” it wasn’t Jay “Don’t think so?” it wasn’t Dad but don’t
worry I’m okay now I said because I was warmed we were walking together

another time

you touch my skin with your eyes  soft blue penetrates lures me within reach  I want
to melt time go beyond flesh you guide I rise rise to peak and crash to vision
childhood home attic black silhouette from rafter gray view i push you away you
remain at my reach

it recurs again and again and again

i walk behind sons Dad dead behind me leaving him forever i am broken i crumble
i’m falling and am caught by an uncle soothed i move along put greeting arms out to
another as if my arms were live wires of two hundred and twenty volts snaking at him
he jolts jumps back wide eyed “questioned everyone” i heard Dad say and dirty i
walk away

months ago and now

you at my reach reach for me touch my skin your eyes soft blue penetrates
beyond time i rise rise to peak crash to visions of baby girl in baby dolls white
sheets mattress on floor lights and cameras wide-eyed step-uncle jumped back jolts
me gray before i leave for rafter view and return to stepmother scorn me nothin’ but
a goddamned tramp as she scourst baby girl skin and scrubs baby doll blood

you reach for me beyond reach speech
Dad bearing child’s cries

You took from my hands
what my young-mother-self
couldn’t carry

you carried my burden
in silence
placing the pieces back
into my hands in little bits
gently building up my arms
so I hardly noticed

you place the last pieces
into my hands only now
that you’ve advanced in
your position of guidance
to a parent divine
whose child is never alone
you give me strength

my arms bulge
with the load
but my chest
caves for you

you lived the terror of my life
fearing I’d learn that a child
of mine has been clutched
dammed to experience
haunted by encounters
that kept me
weak

I can’t imagine
your grief
may i never live
your torment
Resolve for justice

On a Sunday morning when police

break silence  hung-over

step-uncle  will be  bowed at table
coffee not quite ready  tempting
aroma lingering  day's first cigarette

smoke billowing

rubbing his forehead  he won't move
his wife  will open door  to search

order

for little girl not yet five

peace warranted

and for Dad who learned
late and questioned to death
A living will

From mother’s womb
to mother in the earth
where your poetry
begins I will part
with your ashes
knowing there is no end
to “songs of kindness
and love” from son
to mother and daughter
to dad all you were
and all I am will be
passed along in life
to sons as best
I can I vow I will
live as you will
and not die before death
I will stand up for
you who stood for me
and for sons I will
live whole because I am
of your hands I hold
strong because I am

I will
find rest
Vita Auctoris

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