

Robert Nordstrom

When Mother Died

Over wires the news arrives.
My response yes, good, finally
but no one to speak it to,
so instead yes, ok, we're on our way.

Standing in the funeral home parlor
Pastor Browser—not his name,
one I made up, the only one
I remember now—and I
search for a place to scatter
small talk, land our gaze.

My four-year-old daughter,
sensing advantage in indecision, breaks free,
sprints down the funeral home nave,
chins over the casket,
and proclaims, Snow White. Behind me,

the ghosts of my youth touch my shoulder,
their condolences mingling
with the room's sweet floral-infused aromas.
Later, a 2000-year-old resurrection sermon
doubling as eulogy, a long amnesic sleep,

as if that sliver of apple were lodged
in my throat.

Trip to the Grocery Store

the I observing the I
becomes the you

how unceremoniously
you return different

from who you were
when you left:

driving down the highway
provocative pines swaying

ash's bare branches
spreading open and shut

teasing
the dirty part of winter

the young woman
with blue words

you wish to but cannot
read tattooed on her wrist

looking up
smiling

as she places blueberries
in the bag then

back down the highway
right lane below the limit

home

Deduction

The scientist says Ardi,
short for Ardipithecus,
our 4.4-million-year-old ancestor,
probably traded copulation for food.

Ardi, sexy little Ardi,
our Pliocenic Babs—
never quite sure just how
they deduce these hypothetical presumptions
from a pile of dusty old bones.

But deduce is what we do.
Perhaps this scientist, when he was a child,
deduced that he could seduce
the little girl next door with a piece of candy
and discovered his clinical bones
so to speak
playing doctor in a musty old closet.

Not an unreasonable deduction:
My brother as an adolescent
would tilt the lampshade
so the light shined on his face just right
and ten years later
was announcing the news on TV.

Mother, as a young housewife,
sat at the piano playing Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing
over and over while staring at a blank wall
and a couple of decades later was talking gibberish
to the nursing home walls.

I, as a child,
snuck off to the woods,
crawled into the undergrowth,
covered myself with leaves

and here I am, a half century later, thinking
Little Ardi should have picked her own bananas,
wishing Mother would have played another song.

Resolution

When does one exit the quarrel? Cynics vote
death. I choose today, a day of labor—
pressure washer and backyard deck, rote
stains washed away, torpor-

tinged habits rinsed clean, like old viscous oils
rendered, released of pretense
and mucilaginous ways, the toil
of flow chart arrows pointing here...there...hence

nowhere. The body's labor now the body's reward.
And later, served on a platter,
a cold beer toasting a sinking sun poured
into molten clouds illuminating what matters:

The shade beneath
this ring of trees wound into an earthly wreath.

Mother's Sitcom Wisdom

Picture

the tagalong kid,
little brother who'll surely find
a frog to bother or puddle to play in
while older brother and father
dangle lines in the river, perform
the serious and tedious work of bonding.

Picture

little brother pleased and proud
to hold big brother's pole
when he gets up to pee,
nearly peeing himself
when bobber dips, cane pole jerks
and up pops a three-inch bluegill
flopping and wriggling
on the weed-tufted shore.

Picture

little brother afterthought,
excited as a river burble
that he's snagged the big one,
the only one, sadly
as it turns out,
right through the eye—
mistake, miscalculation,
like spilling milk
at the dinner table,
no call for decapitation/cannibalization,
he reasons, they say whines,

then acquiesce,
out of weariness, not mercy—
quit your crying and keep the damn fish
(big brother thinking)
let her make the decision, read last rites,
(Dad grumbling to himself)—

which she does, standing in the kitchen
staring into the milky gaze
of a one-eyed blue gill
while considering
Aunt Bee's no-nonsense advice
Donna Stone's empathetic kindness

(Lucy no help here)
all of whom she's been studying
on the 19-inch RCA for several years now,

before commanding
scat now, wash your hands,
for you, only you,
on your fork then in your tummy,
with you, only you,
forever.

Robert Nordstrom is a poet, former editor, and recently retired school bus driver who devoted six years teaching high schoolers how to respond when an adult says good morning and kindergarteners that it's probably best they not lick the seat in front of them. His work has appeared in *Upstreet*, *Main Street Rag*, *Comstock Review*, *Naugatuck River Review* and many other literary publications. His poetry collection *The Sacred Monotony of Breath* (Prolific Press) was published in 2015. www.RobertNordstrom.com