

Basking

John Grey

There's a conversation I long
to have with my father,
beyond the usual "miss you,"
about the one day
I caught my biggest trout ever,
a giant compared to the minnows
he'd been reeling in.

In fact, we cast that line in unison,
farther out than I could manage on my own,
and this fish, as if an extra in our play,
grabbed onto the bait,
followed the script perfectly.

He bragged to all who'd listen
how his son had bagged a record breaker
though it were his hands folded over mine
that did most of the heavy work,
his muscle and sweat that pulled it to shore.

I want to touch those thick fingers,
admire his chin's dark stubble,
but mostly hear his deep voice explain
why he let me take all the glory.

So there's a conversation I long
to have with my father,
about the day he caught the biggest trout ever,
why he reeled me in like one more minnow,
muttered something like, "Good job son."

I was glad to bask in it then.

But now my basking days are through.

And the glory needs a new home.

In a Recent Dream

John Grey

I play in my backyard,
keeping peace
in the imagined badlands,
running and laughing
on repeat,
then stop suddenly,
look up,

see my mother
in the kitchen window,
thin and gray,
the silent hands,
the old wounds,
drab colors,
a window for each eye,
framed by weatherboards
gleaming from the setting sun.

East already black,
time to go in,
as the grass fades
and the fence is disappearing,

but for me,
just me,
let me be a child,

a moment more
please -
a moment.

Dinner's ready,
she mouths.

With ghosts
and with memory,

sometimes the eyes
hear so much clearer
than the ears.

That Failed First Attempt

John Grey

So there we were.

In a shed of all places.

Your back uncomfortable against a lawn mower.

Me nudging aside paint cans and footballs

to make a space.

I was seventeen, old enough

but as raw as any rookie

and still under the moral thumb

of parents.

You were a year older

but equally as untutored, uninformed,

I closed the door

to make it dark.

Too dark.

A slight movement

brought a shovel down crashing.

You caught your blouse on a nail.

My jeans leg dipped in something wet.

And there was that deflated raft to contend with.

It wasn't romantic.
Barely enjoyable.
No shirt was unbuttoned.
No hands went off in search
of something that wasn't a gardening tool.
We kissed a couple of times
and then, to the sound of hedge-clippers
smacking against cement,
said, in unison, let's not.

It was twilight as we exited,
touched hands briefly, then parted.
I smelled like gasoline.
Your pants were stained with oil.
What could we tell our folks?
Been peeking under the hood again?