**The Faithful Wife**

by Barbara Greenberg, 1978

but if i were to have a lover, it would be someone

who could take nothing from you. i would, in conscience,

not dishonor you. he and i would eat at Howard Johnson's

which you and i do not enjoy. with him i would go

fishing because it is not your sport. he would wear blue

which is your worst color; he would have none of your virtues.

not strong, not proud, not just, not provident, my lover

would blame me for his heart's distress, which you would never

think to do. he and i would drink too much and weep together

and i would bruise his face as i would not bruise your face

even in my dreams. yes i would dance with him, but to a music

you and i would never choose to hear, and in a place

where you and i would never wish to be. he and i would speak

Spanish, which is not your tongue, and we would take

long walks in fields of burdock, to which you are allergic.

we would make love only in the morning. it would be

altogether different. i would know him with my other body,

the one that you have never asked to see.

**The Paperweight**by Gjertrud Schanckenberg

The scene within the paperweight is calm,  
A small white house, a laughing man and wife,  
Deep snow. I turn it over in my palm  
And watch it snowing in another life,

Another world, and from this scene learn what  
It is to stand apart: she serves him tea  
Once and forever, dressed from head to foot  
As she is always dressed. In this toy, history

Sifts down through the glass like snow, and we  
Wonder if her single deed tells much  
Or little of the way she loves, and whether he  
Sees shadows in the sky. Beyond our touch,

Beyond our lives, they laugh, and drink their tea.  
We look at them just as the winter night  
With its vast empty spaces bends to see  
Our isolated little world of light,

Covered with snow, and snow in clouds above it,  
And drifts and swirls too deep to understand.  
Still, I must try to think a little of it,  
With so much winter in my head and hand.

**The Road Not Taken   
By Robert Frost**

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could

To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

**Ex-Basketball Player**

**By John Updike**

Pearl Avenue runs past the high-school lot,

Bends with the trolley tracks, and stops, cut off

Before it has a chance to go two blocks,

At Colonel McComsky Plaza. Berth’s Garage

Is on the corner facing west, and there,

Most days, you’ll find Flick Webb, who helps Berth out.

Flick stands tall among the idiot pumps—

Five on a side, the old bubble-head style,

Their rubber elbows hanging loose and low.

One’s nostrils are two S’s, and his eyes

An E and O. And one is squat, without

A head at all--more of a football type.

Once Flick played for the high-school team, the Wizards.

He was good: in fact, the best. In ‘46

He bucketed three hundred ninety points,

A county record still. The ball loved Flick.

I saw him rack up thirty-eight or forty

In one home game. His hands were like wild birds.

He never learned a trade, he just sells gas,

Checks oil, and changes flats. Once in a while,

As a gag, he dribbles an inner tube,

But most of us remember anyway.

His hands are fine and nervous on the lug wrench.

It makes no difference to the lug wrench, though.

Off work, he hangs around Mae’s luncheonette.

Grease-grey and kind of coiled, he plays pinball,

Sips lemon cokes, and smokes those thin cigars.

Flick seldom speaks to Mae, just sits and nods

Beyond her face toward bright applauding tiers

Of Necco Wafers, Nibs, and Juju Beads.

**Dulce et Decorum Est**

By Wilfred Owen

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,

Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,

Till on the glimmering flares we turned our backs,

And towards our distant rest began to trudge.

Halting each mile for some. Many had lost their boots,

But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;

Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots

Of disappointed shells dropping softly behind.

Gas! Gas! Quick, boys! - An ecstasy of fumbling,

Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;

But someone still was yelling out and stumbling

And floundering like a man in fire or lime -

Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light.

As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,

He plunges at me, gargling, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace

Behind the limber that we flung him in,

And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,

His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;

If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood

Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,

And think how once his face was like a bud

Fresh as a country rose, and clean and young

My friend, you would not tell with such high zest

To children ardent for some desperate glory

The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est

Pro patria mori.

**The Man He Killed**  
By Thomas Hardy

"Had he and I but met  
        By some old ancient inn,  
We should have sat us down to wet  
        Right many a nipperkin!

        "But ranged as infantry,  
        And staring face to face,  
I shot at him and he at me,  
        And killed him in his place.

        "I shot him dead because –   
        Because he was my foe,   
Just so – my foe of course he was;   
        That's clear enough; although

        "He thought he'd 'list perhaps,   
        Off-hand like – just as I –   
Was out of work – had sold his traps –   
        No other reason why.

        "Yes; quaint and curious war is!   
        You shoot a fellow down   
You'd treat if met where any bar is,   
        Or help to half-a-crown."

**Southern Cop**

By Sterling Brown

Let us forgive Ty Kendricks.

The place was Darktown. He was young.

His nerves were jittery. The day was hot.

The Negro ran out of the alley.

And so Ty shot.

Let us understand Ty Kendricks.

The Negro must have been dangerous,

Because he ran;

And there was a rookie with a chance

To prove himself a man.

Let us condone Ty Kendricks

If we cannot decorate.

When he found what the Negro was running for,

It was too late;

And all we can say for the Negro is

It was unfortunate.

Let us pity Ty Kendricks.

He has been through enough,

Standing there, his big gun smoking,

Rabbit scared, alone,

Having to hear the wenches wail

And the dying Negro moan.

**The Abortion**

by Anne Sexton

Somebody who should have been born   
is gone.   
  
Just as the earth puckered its mouth,   
each bud puffing out from its knot,  
I changed my shoes, and then drove south.   
  
Up past the Blue Mountains, where   
Pennsylvania humps on endlessly,  
wearing, like a crayoned cat, its green hair,   
  
its roads sunken in like a gray washboard;   
where, in truth, the ground cracks evilly,   
a dark socket from which the coal has poured,  
  
  
Somebody who should have been born  
is gone.   
  
the grass as bristly and stout as chives,  
and me wondering when the ground would break,   
and me wondering how anything fragile survives;   
  
up in Pennsylvania, I met a little man,  
not Rumpelstiltskin, at all, at all...   
he took the fullness that love began.   
  
Returning north, even the sky grew thin  
like a high window looking nowhere.  
The road was as flat as a sheet of tin.   
  
Somebody who should have been born   
is gone.   
  
Yes, woman, such logic will lead  
to loss without death. Or say what you meant,   
you coward...this baby that I bleed.

**Elllie Mae Leaves in a Hurry**

By Peter Klappert

There’s some who say she put death up her dress

And some who say they saw her pour it down.

It’s not the sort of thing you want to press

So we just assumed she planned on leaving town

And gave her money for the first express.

She had some family up in Puget Sound.

Well we are married men. We’ve got interests.

You can’t take children out like cats to drown.

It’s not the sort of thing you want to press.

We didn’t know she’d go and pour death down,

Though most of us had heard of her distress.

We just assumed she planned on leaving town.

There’s some of us who put death up her dress

But she had family up in Puget Sound.

We gave her money for the first express.

Well we are married men. We’ve got interest.

Though most of us had heard of her distress.

You can’t take children out like cats to drown,

It’s just the sort of news that gets around.

**The Victims**

By Sharon Olds

When Mother divorced you, we were glad. She took it and

took it, in silence, all those years and then

kicked you out, suddenly, and her

kids loved it. Then you were fired, and we

grinned inside, the way people grinned when

Nixon’s helicopter lifted off the South

lawn for the last time. We were tickled

to think of your offices taken away,

your secretaries taken away,

your luncheons with three double bourbons,

your pencils, your reams of paper. Would they take your

suits back, too, those dark

carcasses hung in your closet, and the black

noses of your shoes with their large pores?

She had taught us to take it, to hate you and take it

until we pricked with her for your

annihilation, Father. Now I

pass the bums in the doorways, the white

slugs of their bodies gleaming through the slits in their

suits of compressed silt, the stained

flippers of their hands, the underwater

fire of their eyes, ships gone down with the

lanterns lit, and I wonder who took it and

took it from them in silence until they had

given it all away and had nothing

left but this.

**Why my mother made me**  
By Sharon Olds

Maybe I am what she always wanted,my father as a woman,maybe I am what she wanted to bewhen she first saw him, tall and smart,standing there in the college yard with thehard male light of 1937shining on his slicked hair. She wanted thatpower. She wanted that size. She pulled andpulled through him as if he were silkybourbon taffy, she pulled and pulled andpulled through his body till she drew me out,sticky and gleaming, her life after her life.Maybe I am the way I ambecause she wanted exactly that,wanted there to be a womana lot like her, but who would not hold back, so shepressed herself, hard, against him,pressed and pressed the clear softball of herself like a stick of beaten creamagainst his stained sour steel grateruntil I came out the other side of his body,a tall woman, stained, sour, sharp,but with milk at the center of my nature.I lie here now as I once layin the crook of her arm, her creature,and I feel her looking down into me the waythe maker of a sword gazes at his facein the steel of the blade.

**Phenomenal Woman**

by Maya Angelou

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.  
I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size  
But when I start to tell them,  
They think I'm telling lies.  
I say,  
It's in the reach of my arms  
The span of my hips,  
The stride of my step,  
The curl of my lips.  
I'm a woman  
Phenomenally.  
Phenomenal woman,  
That's me.  
  
I walk into a room  
Just as cool as you please,  
And to a man,  
The fellows stand or  
Fall down on their knees.  
Then they swarm around me,  
A hive of honey bees.  
I say,  
It's the fire in my eyes,  
And the flash of my teeth,  
The swing in my waist,  
And the joy in my feet.  
I'm a woman  
Phenomenally.  
Phenomenal woman,  
That's me.  
  
Men themselves have wondered  
What they see in me.  
They try so much  
But they can't touch  
My inner mystery.  
When I try to show them  
They say they still can't see.  
I say,  
It's in the arch of my back,  
The sun of my smile,  
The ride of my breasts,  
The grace of my style.  
I'm a woman  
  
Phenomenally.  
Phenomenal woman,  
That's me.  
  
Now you understand  
Just why my head's not bowed.  
I don't shout or jump about  
Or have to talk real loud.  
When you see me passing  
It ought to make you proud.  
I say,  
It's in the click of my heels,  
The bend of my hair,  
the palm of my hand,  
The need of my care,  
'Cause I'm a woman  
Phenomenally.  
Phenomenal woman,  
That's me.

**Barbie Doll**

By Marge Piercy

This girlchild was born as usual

and presented dolls that did pee-pee

and miniature GE stoves and irons

and wee lipsticks the color of cherry candy.

Then in the magic of puberty, a classmate said:

You have a great big nose and fat legs.

She was healthy, tested intelligent,

possessed strong arms and back,

abundant sexual drive and manual dexterity.

She went to and fro apologizing.

Everyone saw a fat nose on thick legs.

She was advised to play coy,

exhorted to come on hearty,

exercise, diet, smile and wheedle.

Her good nature wore out

like a fan belt.

So she cut off her nose and her legs

and offered them up.

In the casket displayed on satin she lay

with the undertaker's cosmetics painted on,

a turned-up putty nose,

dressed in a pink and white nightie.

Doesn't she look pretty? everyone said.

Consummation at last.

To every woman a happy ending.

**For the Suicides of 1962   
By Donald Justice**

If we recall your voices  
As softer now, it’s only  
That they must have drifted back

A long way to have reached us  
Here, and upon such a wind  
As crosses the high passes.

Nor does the blue of your eyes  
(Remembered) cast much light on  
The page ripped from the tablet.

\*

Once there in the labyrinth,  
You were safe from your reasons.  
We stand, now, at the threshold,

Peering in, but the passage,  
For us, remains obscure; the  
Corridors are still bloody.

\*

What you meant to prove you have  
Proved: we did not care for you  
nearly enough. Meanwhile the

Bay was preparing herself  
To receive you, the for once  
Wholly adequate female

To your dark inclinations;  
Under your care, the pistol  
Was slowly learning to flower

In the desired explosion  
Disturbing the careful part  
And the briefly recovered

Fixed smile of a forgotten  
Triumph; deep within the black  
Forest of childhood that tree

Was already rising which,  
With the length of your body,  
Would cast the double shadow.

\*

The masks by which we knew you  
Have been torn from you. Even  
Those mirrors, to which always

You must have turned to confide,  
Cannot have recognized you,  
Stripped, as you were, finally.

At the end of your shadow  
There sat another, waiting,  
Whose back was always to us.

\*

When the last door had been closed,  
You watched, inwardly raging,  
For the first glimpse of your selves  
Approaching, jangling their keys.

Musicians of the black keys,  
At last you compose yourselves.  
We hear the music raging  
Under the lids we have closed.

**The Letter**

**By Jane Kenyon**

Bad news arrives in her distinctive hand.

The cancer has returned, this time

to his brain. Surgery impossible,

treatments under way. Hair loss, bouts

of sleeplessness and agitation at night,

exhaustion during the day.

I snap the blue leash onto the D-ring

of the dog’s collar, and we cross

Route 4, then cut through the hayfield

to the pond road, where I let him run

along with my morbidity.

The trees have leafed out-only just-

and the air is misty with sap.

So green, so brightly, richly succulent,

this arbor over the road…

Sunlight penetrates in golden drops.

We come to the place where a neighbor

is taking timber from his land.

There’s a smell of lacerated earth

and pine. Hardwood smells different.

His truck is gone.

Now you can see well up the slope,

see ledges of rock and ferns breaking forth

among the stumps and cast-aside limbs

and branches .

The place will heal itself in time, first

with weeds-goldenrod, cinquefoil, moth

mullein-then blackberries, sapling

pine, deciduous trees…But for now

the dog rolls, jovial, in the pungent

disturbance of wood and earth.

I summon him with a word, turn back,

And we go the long way home.

**The Widow’s Lament in Springtime**By William Carlos Williams

Sorrow is my own yard   
where the new grass   
flames as it has flamed   
often before, but not   
with the cold fire   
that closes round me this year.   
Thirty-five years   
I lived with my husband.   
The plum tree is white today   
with masses of flowers.   
Masses of flowers   
load the cherry branches   
and color some bushes   
yellow and some red,   
but the grief in my heart   
is stronger than they,   
for though they were my joy   
formerly, today I notice them   
and turn away forgetting.   
Today my son told me   
that in the meadows,   
at the edge of the heavy woods   
in the distance, he saw   
trees of white flowers.   
I feel that I would like   
to go there   
and fall into those flowers   
and sink into the marsh near them.

**The Racer's Widow**

By [Louise Glück](http://hellopoetry.com/-louise-gluck/)

The elements have merged into solicitude,  
Spasms of violets rise above the mud  
And weed, and soon the birds and ancients  
Will be starting to arrive, bereaving points  
South. But never mind. It is not painful to discuss  
His death. I have been primed for this --  
For separation -- for so long. But still his face assaults  
Me; I can hear that car careen again, the crowd coagulate on asphalt  
In my sleep. And watching him, I feel my legs like snow  
That let him finally let him go  
As he lies draining there. And see  
How even he did not get to keep that lovely body.

**Funeral Blues**

W.H. Auden

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,

Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,

Silence the pianos and with muffled drum

Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead

Scribbling on the sky the message 'He is Dead'.

Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,

Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,

My working week and my Sunday rest,

My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;

I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now; put out every one,

Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun,

Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;

For nothing now can ever come to any good.

**Grandmother’s Song**

by NellieWong

Grandmothers sing their song

Blinded by the sun’s rays

Grandchildren for whom they long

For pomelo-golden days

Blinded by the sun’s rays

Gold bracelets, opal rings

For pomelo-golden days

Tiny fingers, ancient things

Gold bracelets, opal rings

Sprinkled with Peking dust

Tiny fingers, ancient things

So young they’ll never rust

Sprinkled with Peking dust

To dance in fields of mud

So young they’ll never rust

Proud as if of royal blood

To dance in fields of mud

Or peel shrimp for pennies a day

Proud as if of royal blood

Coins and jade to put away

Or peel shrimp for pennies a day

Seaweed washes up on the shore

Coins and jade to put away

A camphor chest is home no more

Seaweed washes up on the shore

Bound feet struggle to loosen free

A Camphor chest is home no more

A foreign tongue is leaned at three

Bound feet struggle to loosen free

Grandchildren for whom they long

A foreign tongue is learned at three

Grandmothers sing their song.

**The Immigrants**  
By Margaret Atwood

They are allowed to inherit  
the sidewalks involved as palmlines, bricks  
exhausted and soft, the deep  
lawnsmells, the orchards whorled  
to the land’s contours, the inflected weather

only to be told they are too poor  
to keep it up, or someone  
has noticed and wants to kill them; or the towns  
pass laws which declare them obsolete.

I see them coming  
up from the hold smelling of vomit,  
infested, emaciated, their skins grey  
with travel; as they step on shore

the old countries recede, become  
perfect, thumbnail castles preserved  
like gallstones in a glass bottle, the  
towns dwindle upon the hillsides  
in a light paperweight-clear.

They carry their carpetbags and trunks  
with clothes, dishes, the family pictures;  
they think they will make an order   
like the old one, sow miniature orchards,  
carve children and flocks of wood

but always they are too poor, the sky  
is flat, the green fruit shrivels  
in the prairie sun, the wood is for burning;  
and if they go back, the towns

in time have crumbled, their tongues  
stumble among awkward teeth, their ears  
are filled with the sound of breaking glass.  
I wish I could forget them  
and so forgot myself:

My mind is a wide pink map  
across which move year after year  
arrows and dotted lines, further and further,  
people in railway cars

their heads stuck out of the windows|  
at stations, drinking milk or singing  
their features hidden with beards or shawls  
day and night riding across an ocean of unknown  
land to an unknown land.

**Men at Forty**   
*Donald Justice (b. 1925)*   
  
Men at forty   
Learn to close softly   
The doors to rooms they will not be   
Coming back to.   
  
At rest on a stair landing,   
They feel it   
Moving beneath them now like the deck of a ship,   
Though the swell is gentle.   
  
And deep in mirrors   
The rediscover   
The face of the boy as he practices trying   
His father’s tie there in secret   
  
And the face of that father,   
Still warm with the mystery of lather.   
They are more fathers than sons themselves now.   
Something is filling them, something   
  
That is like the twilight sound   
Of the crickets, immense,   
Filling the woods at the foot of the slope   
Behind their mortgaged houses.

**after minor surgery**

by Linda Pastan

this is the dress rehearsal  
  
when the body  
like a constant lover  
flirts for the first time  
with faithlessness  
  
when the body  
like a passenger on a long journey  
hears the conductor call out  
the name  
of the first stop  
  
when the body  
in all its fear and cunning  
makes promises to me  
it knows  
it cannot keep

**Dog's Death**By John Updike

She must have been kicked unseen or brushed by a car.  
Too young to know much, she was beginning to learn  
To use the newspapers spread on the kitchen floor  
And to win, wetting there, the words, "Good dog!  
Good dog!"

We thought her shy malaise was a shot reaction.  
The autopsy disclosed a rupture in her liver.  
As we teased her with play, blood was filling her skin  
And her heart was learning to lie down forever.

Monday morning, as the children were noisily fed  
And sent to school, she crawled beneath the youngest's bed.  
We found her twisted and limp but still alive.  
In the car to the vet's, on my lap, she tried

To bite my hand and died. I stroked her warm fur  
And my wife called in a voice imperious with tears.  
Though surrounded by love that would have upheld her,  
Nevertheless she sank and, stiffening, disappeared.

Back home, we found that in the night her frame,  
Drawing near to dissolution, had endured the shame  
Of diarrhoea and had dragged across the floor  
To a newspaper carelessly left there. *Good dog*.

**The Pardon**By Richard Wilbur

My dog lay dead five days without a grave   
In the thick of summer, hid in a clump of pine   
And a jungle of grass and honey-suckle vine.   
I who had loved him while he kept alive

Went only close enough to where he was   
To sniff the heavy honeysuckle-smell   
Twined with another odor heavier still   
And hear the flies' intolerable buzz.

Well, I was ten and very much afraid.   
In my kind world the dead were out of range   
And I could not forgive the sad or strange   
In beast or man. My father took the spade

And buried him. Last night I saw the grass   
Slowly divide (it was the same scene   
But now it glowed a fierce and mortal green)   
And saw the dog emerging. I confess

I felt afraid again, but still he came   
In the carnal sun, clothed in a hymn of flies,   
And death was breeding in his lively eyes.   
I started in to cry and call his name,

Asking forgiveness of his tongueless head.   
..I dreamt the past was never past redeeming:   
But whether this was false or honest dreaming   
I beg death's pardon now. And mourn the dead.

**Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night**

By Dylan Thomas

Do not go gentle into that good night.

Old age should burn and rave at close of day.

Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,

Because their words had forked no lightening they

Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright

Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,

Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,

And learn too late, they grieved it on its way,

Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight

Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,

Rage, rage against the dying of the light

And you, my father, there on the sad height,

Curse, bless me now with your fierce tears, I pray.

Do not go gentle into that good night.   
Rage, rage against the dying of the light

**O Captain! My Captain!**   
by Walt Whitman

1

O CAPTAIN! my Captain! our fearful trip is done;   
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won;   
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,   
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring:   
But O heart! heart! heart!  
O the bleeding drops of red,   
Where on the deck my Captain lies,   
Fallen cold and dead.

2

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;   
Rise up-for you the flag is flung-for you the bugle trills;  
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths-for you the shores a-crowding;   
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;   
Here Captain! dear father!   
This arm beneath your head;   
It is some dream that on the deck,  
You've fallen cold and dead.

3

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still;   
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will;   
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done;   
From fearful trip, the victor ship, comes in with object won;  
Exult, O shores, and ring, O bells!   
But I, with mournful tread,   
Walk the deck my Captain lies,   
Fallen cold and dead.

**Those Winter Sundays**

by Robert Hayden

Sundays too my father got up early  
And put his clothes on in the blueback cold,  
then with cracked hands that ached  
from labor in the weekday weather made  
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.  
  
I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.  
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,  
and slowly I would rise and dress,  
fearing the chronic angers of that house,  
  
Speaking indifferently to him,  
who had driven out the cold  
and polished my good shoes as well.  
What did I know, what did I know  
of love's austere and lonely offices?

**Digging**

By Seamus Heaney

Between my finger and my thumb

The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound

When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:

My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds

Bends low, comes up twenty years away

Stooping in rhythm through potato drills

Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft

Against the inside knee was levered firmly.

He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep

To scatter new potatoes that we picked,

Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God, the old man could handle a spade.

Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day

Than any other man on Toner’s bog.

Once I carried him milk in a bottle

Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up

To drink it, then fell to right away

Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods

Over his shoulder, going down and down

For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap

Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge

Through living roots awaken in my head.

But I’ve no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb

The squat pen rests.

I’ll dig with it.

**My Papa’s Waltz**

By Theodore Roethke

The whiskey on your breath

Could make a small boy dizzy;

But I hung on like death:

Such waltzing was not easy.

We romped until the pans

Slid from the kitchen shelf;

My mother’s countenance

Could not unfrown itself.

The hand that held my wrist

Was battered on one knuckle;

At every step you missed

My right ear scraped a buckle.

You beat time on my head

With a palm caked hard by dirt,

Then waltzed me off to bed   
Still clinging to your shirt.**My Papa’s Waltz**

[**My Papa’s Waltz**](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172103#poem)

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