

Thanksgiving Dinner

Category: Poems

written by Allie Gips | December 2, 2016

Allie Gips

and for the third time my grandfather grabs the bottle of sparkling cider
and for the third time it is empty and for the third time his face falls
of all the things to forget this is not the saddest
he forgets how the trees are laid out in the woods behind his house,
forgets whether he took his pills in the morning, forgets to protect
my grandmother in the dark of the night
when he wakes to declare that the whole room stinks, it stinks so bad,
it stinks and he has to sleep elsewhere he tells my grandmother who clings
to him and begs stay with me, stay with me so i don't grow cold

outside the once-familiar trees grow naked and gaunt and we are always
one storm away from blocking in the driveway, one storm away from
cutting off the power, one storm away from a giant trunk crashing through
the living room—which it did, some two years back, though my grandfather
has forgotten this. it is true: there is a forgetting that is wrenching
and then there is a forgetting that must seem like some kind of forgiveness
these days the list of things i would like to forget seems long
these days even the satirists have thrown up their hands and said
this shit is just too sad to ever be funny. last spring my grandmother
was diagnosed with cancer for the third time—the breast the colon
the salivary gland, our bodies the betrayers—and we tossed toxins
and radiation at her till she couldn't eat, till even the sight of a utensil
made her want to vomit, and for a while there were talks of feeding tubes
of hospitalizations of things that in an eighty-eight-year-old make you think
that we have at last lost sight of our mortality, of the fact that we are
only humans
borrowing days coin by coin. but then my sweet old white-haired
teddy-bear-collecting grandmother started smoking the reefer, delicately
puffing
on thin long joints, and slowly the pounds returned until one day senile
grandpa
kindly put away her pot and then could never remember where he stashed it.
my grandparents the kingpins, sitting on a pile of weed they can't find
waiting for the trees to fall, for the well of memories to dry up, for the
darkness
and the cold of the inevitable winter power outage
in the meantime we sit at the thanksgiving table, count our many blessings
and heap our plates with food aplenty, food in excess.
of all the things to forget, this is surely not the saddest
but still i pray that amidst this bounty, amidst these overflowing platters
my grandfather will not again reach for the sparkling cider
and feel for the fourth time tonight that sharp pain
that acute disappointment

tipping the bottle toward the glass only to discover
once more
its emptiness

About the poet:

A native Mainer, Allie Gips is a second-year emergency-medicine resident at Boston Medical Center. This is her second poem to appear in [Pulse](#).

About the poem:

“Since this poem was written, my grandparents moved from the home they’d lived in for their entire marriage to a nearby apartment in an assisted-living facility. My grandfather had spent his whole life—almost nine decades—on the same land, and he had built their house himself. The decision to leave was complicated and heartbreaking, and my mother showed incredible compassion, wisdom and patience in guiding my grandparents through the emotional and logistical obstacles of the move. My grandmother is currently cancer-free. We celebrated her ninetieth birthday this past April in my grandparents’ new home, which they both have now come to love.”

Poetry editors:

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