

AN IMPERFECT Eulogy

1970

for a blue-eyed grandmother

Sitting on a rocking toilet, glasses too fogged to see the writing
Flesh of my stomach doubling over itself... fat pieces of flesh I
can squeeze,
shove
twist
into masses of different shapes.

"GRANDMOTHER PASSED AWAY"

Somewhere deep within the fat, fleshy masses, a chord strikes,
bringing tears, and images:

blue eyes under a forehead covered with wisps of
balding grey, a wrinkled face, gold inlaid teeth...

The flesh is made word
on a rocking toilet stool

And the words, wetted, join fluidly with the tears

Both speak a love of the flesh, a love of a woman
who lived her imperfect, fragile life, and, while living,
touched my imperfect, fragile life, with her naive, simple-- every
way human-- love

Words and tears ... for the flesh of that face, the laugh, when the
head would lean back, the eyes smiling, the cheeks, dimpled, lighting
flesh...
which passed away

A Bathroom for a eulogy. The world for our home. Flesh,
our meaning. Flesh which feeds the words, and which
feeds the love from the heart.

A man enters to wash the floor, soaking
his mop in a pail. Laughing,
talking indistinct Japanese.

All merge with his running water in
perfect imperfection, in the frailty
of the fragile moment?

Trying to hold in dissolving stomach fat tis
spitting accumulated mucus,
excreting feces

I seek ^{express} all that is human and loving,
spiritual and divine.

Food, flesh, excrement, tears, words merge
into the oneness of life... in all
its fragility, pain, and love

SHANTIH --- the wisdom which passeth understanding

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A previous draft and Johanna comments on it.

The poem about Grandma Dorothy was really touching, I could feel your raw pain across all these years. Then your reflection on turning grief into grammar was really striking. The poem above is a better structured poem than the draft below. . What succeeds best in the one above is the wrestling with the impermanence of the flesh while being immersed in the flesh. The awareness of human imperfection as a kind of perfection also comes through clearly.

DEATH OF A BLUE EYED GRANDMA

My grandmother had died
at the end of June.

O. Twisting pieces of stomach
flesh into different shapes,
he sat on a rocking toilet
staring through fogged glasses
at a telegram:
"Grandmother passed away"

D = 13
J = 15
too much
striving
for effect

Deep within his flesh a chord
struck, bringing tears and
images:

blue eyes under a
forehead covered with
wisps of balding grey
wrinkled face, gold
inlaid teeth ~~and~~ revealed
~~stomach~~ when the head

J comment: This is so sad. I can feel your pain and your not really knowing how to handle it, almost trying to hurt yourself to stop the pain, while searching desperately for images of the grandma who has disappeared.

leaned back, laughing,
the cheeks dimpled, lighting
the flesh
which passed away.

Trying to hold in dissolving stomach
fatty tissue,

Spitting accumulated mucus,

Excreting feces,

He sat in the bathroom writing
a Eulogy of love.

The flesh is made word
on a rocking toilet stool.

SHANTIM -- the wisdom which passeth
understanding

J comment 2018: I like the way you manifest the theme of "the flesh made word" – through your own stomach, mucus, and excrement. Sitting on a toilet to write a poem of love is both ugly and moving.

Some comments on the process of writing...it's therapeutic benefit, and some challenges in "distancing."

[Writing can be callous. Putting together artistically adjectives ~~and~~ GOLD, BALDING, to form an effect, it is easy to forget those adjectives where once a person's life, not ^{only} metaphors or similes in an artist's handbag.] What was once life becomes a progressive participle. The artist sees them as the same.]

J comment: 2018 a really good point: The artist is a kind of cannibal that takes every experience no matter how much pain and suffering it involved and turns it instrumentally toward art. Love the line “what was once life becomes a progressive participle.” That’s strong writing!

This above is a “yes” and....i think for me, as I’m reading through this journal now (11/8/18, art was also a way to cope with , create some distance, (and a sense of control) over feelings, events over which I didn’t really have active control. It gave me a way to create in a positive assertive way, which helped me in coming to some peace and acceptance (about life, about me).

J’s comment (2018) I agree, you were trying to cope with your own sadness over Grandma Dorothy’s death by transforming it into art. The focus on craft might have created distance, and the idea that you had created art might have been an effort to give death some meaning.

Johanna; comments: “On the Pain of Death” is a poignant, sorrowful poem. It describes the death of the author's beloved blue-eyed grandma. Her life is described as a “barely vibrating flame,” suggesting something both fragile and vulnerable but also intense. All it takes is a “soft breeze” to extinguish it, implying that death was gentle and easy. The title, however, suggests the pain and suffering of death.

A related poem “And the Fragility of Life,” echoes the theme of fragility. But in this poem the grandmother is a “powerful stone” holding that “vibrating flame,” which has now lost the qualifier “barely.” Instead the image is one of impregnability, passion and power. Yet, despite this different view of the grandmother, once again, all it takes is a “barely felt breeze” to snuff out the zealously burning fire. The tone here is slightly more bitter because of the discrepancy between the grandmother's apparent strength and the ease with which her life is crushed.

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