

Three Poems of Healing & Transcendence by M. D. Friedman

A Good Dog

It was white steam curling over the pot's lip,
the bumping cobs of corn bobbing in bubbles,
the thick, sun-warm, bleeding slices
of Beef Steak Tomatoes and, especially,
the yellow butter's languid pose

that signaled summer was finally here.

The previous November just days
after his twenty third birthday my brother was found
under a pile of decomposing leaves face
down in a deserted Missouri wood.

We heard it first on the St. Louis news:

After a month missing from a St. Charles's Radio Shack,
two employees found shot in back of head,
execution style, motive still not known
for the lunch time abduction.

For the first time that summer
Dad phoned Mom to “put the water on”
he was coming home with freshly picked sweet corn.
It was the only time I remember Mom forgot
to add her secret spoon of sugar to the pot.

We sat at the table closer than normal
around a small basket of wilting memories
gnawed by a nagging emptiness
not discussing that which
never made sense...

When Sister, our dog, snuck in to beg the summer food
she only just sniffed anyway, one stern look from Dad
and she sulked to her place by the kitchen door.
She laid down in trained disappointment,
persisting, almost human, a good dog.

“A Good Dog” was the winner of the Book Habit & New Zealand Poetry Society 2008 Poetry Contest (Dec. 2008) and was published in M. D. Friedman’s collection [*Nothing Else Matters*](#) (2003).

Bedside Manner

~ upon the passing of my mother

The dying have no sense
of when. Everything is
was, each breath,
a terrible wind.

The light of those they love
gathers like a tempestuous mob
shaking smoking torches
outside the window,

blazes like a hidden sun,
flooding the river of glass
with the searing certainty
of inevitable dawn.

The dying always walk
the other way, forgetting
all paths lead back, like breathing,
the way in is the way out.

I was there when she tumbled
like a flaming magnolia
down the long well of her mind.
I felt the exquisite weightlessness,
then her fear. What happens

at the bottom? She clenched
my hand in hers in mine in hers.
Although she was ashen as a tear of dust,
hollow as the peeled skin of snake,

I asked her if she remembered
the time in temple when her just
fallen father's thick veined hand
squeezed hers squeezing mine.

He came to tell you

it's all right. She remembers
to let go. Falls forever.
Nothing is more beautiful.

"Bedside Manner" was published in [*Leaning Toward Whole*](#) (Liquid Light Press, 2011).

The Last Time He Opened His Eyes

These eyes, the color of fog,
blind as night,
reaching out of the driftwood of his body
in place of the arms he could not move,

they held me in a way no arms could.

He, who has given so much,
gave me now this final gift,
this last time together.

This lover of sunsets and old trees,
his face now a shadow cast down by disease,
lay rough and limp as parchment,
an old map washed ashore by time.

In every dark wrinkle,
through each drawn crease,
and over the strangely smooth hollows of his
cheeks,
flowed the gentle kindness that marked his life.

As this, his last sunset
broke in exquisite sadness,
there were no colored clouds
to share the waking dusk.

All his strength went into his breathing,
all his will to open these eyes
the color of fog
heavy with the last light.

“The Last Time He Opened His Eyes” was published in M. D. Friedman’s collection [*The Body of the Mind*](#) (2000).