

Resurrecting Father
(One Who Reappeared)

I

You were brave and curiously calm
before the operation, surrounded
by a sea of white in the early winter air.

Propped up in your bed, you sported
a name tag on your wrist
and the beginnings of a beard,
surprisingly becoming. You said
you were resigned to the chances
to the possibility of not
living through it,
the necessary surgery.

I, the first-born, was with you on my own then,
deceived by the freshness
of the linens, your aneurysm
invisible, how vulnerable
were we all. Other times with my brother
our mother would hover
a bird unsure of her future meals.

You were still the strength of us,
before they put you under
under for the chemical sleep
thirteen hours they informed us later,
a clamp on your vessel
exacting its cost: your brain
(with rigging severed, mast splintered)
a gift none would claim.

II

After – an afterwards which was to linger
and linger – I saw you in the vastness
of Intensive Care, strapped in your bed
with stainless steel sidings
your head bandaged as a turban
pale as a beach after hard rain.

You sighed the sigh of a shipwreck
our living crucifix
limply holding my hand in a daze
a dim smile as I clutched you.
Amazingly, you whispered my name,
surprised that you could whisper
and glad that you could remember.
I witnessed this remnant of your powers
as a fog and waves of salt hurt
invaded you: such thirst
in the sterile air I had never seen.

Grey days later, dark December,
in the difficult humdrum of recuperation
I kept vigil in your room right the night through
for you could not be left unattended.
Your beard was full now
and the surgeon's stitching evident:
you were both laughing dervish
and scrawny victim
in the full throes of hallucination,
with your head of clouded connections
and memory a battered sieve
revealing crazy pebbles and strange gold nuggets.

I had to restrain you
as you imagined yourself
on the deck of your navy destroyer
swaying and listing, my poor dear father,
time-travelling back to late world war two
now sitting at your post at radar
once again seasick and frightened
the salt air and threat of *kamikazes*
exciting your lungs and your eyes.

III

Nearly thirty years onwards,
nursing a low-grade winter virus,
I attempt to chisel poetry
from the suffering and endurance,
the embarrassed bewilderment
and the long drawn out coda,
why, why, why:

That the son must look after his father
as an infant who can do himself danger —
engraves a mark on the psyche, and a scar
I unveil as a trophy,
a whelp I hide
as a flaw.

Now a wizened, chastened child,
he offers fruit from a cracked blue bowl:
I do not know whether he knows
how I have grown
unspeakably old.