

Letters in the Dark

The letter arrived while I slept in the dark.
He seemed alright, as though he expected it.
 But he wasn't, and he hadn't.
She seemed upset, as though it surprised her.
 And she was, but it didn't.

By the time that / was meant to arrive,
He'd been gone longer than I'd have liked.
I always thought he'd be the one to greet me.
Though my "always" was quite short.

From red warmth, unto a blue aseptic steel.
Gentle hands, gloved, but gentle, held me.
And suddenly the warmth returned.
But if the warmth I had known
was the all-encompassing core of the sun itself,
This was but a single ray.
Yet warmth nonetheless.

I learned words for which I had no conception.
Discovering that everything around me had a name,
I believed that it was the act of naming itself
That conceived an object in the first place.

And so I began to name.
At first, I spoke it softly,
gently,
Through a hopeful smile.
Then, I spoke it loudly,
Roughly,
Through gritted teeth.
I spoke it through tears,
Through holes in the wall,
Through little plastic flags on the lawn
That I wanted to tear apart,
Rip into even smaller pieces.

Father, I spoke,
Father, I cried, I begged, I pleaded,
Father, Papa, Daddy, Dad, please!
What are the words to say?
What's the magic behind this trick?

Where are you?

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And then, one day,
The magic worked.
Almost.

The letter arrived, while I slept in the dark.
She held herself together,
Though by strings so taut
That a single breath would snap her in two.

Then, the men arrived, with a big pretty version
Of those little plastic flags on the lawn.
And seeing the soft,
Silky,
Beautiful flag,
I wondered how it would feel
Between my teeth,
I wondered how it would feel
If I bit into it,
And watched it bleed from the seams,
Little shreds blowing into the wind.

Then, the box arrived,
And the father I had so desperately tried to conceive
Was borne before me.
I now had an object for the word,
But what good was this thing to me now?
What good was this lifeless,
tall,
beautiful,
But dead father-object to me now?

This father-object would never teach me how to catch,
How to shave, or how to drive;
I should have never named it at all,
If the magic trick only conceived
This abortion of my once-living father.

Time passed,
More letters arrived.
Trying to give names
To people
To places
To things

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As though they could do a better job in writing,
Than I could in my prayers.

Time passed,
And life went on.
As did war.
Men got letters in the darkness,
And they died in the darkness.
Babes crawled out of the darkness,
And they stumbled themselves back into it.

And one day,
As I slept in the darkness,
The letter arrived.
This time, it bore my name.
I told myself I had expected it.
But I hadn't, and neither will my unborn son.
With my hand over my wife's warm belly,
Over my sleeping love,
I wonder.

One day,
will he too call my name?

If you do, speak not in pain,
Not in wrath,
But through what hope you can muster.
Say my name in grace, in faith, and with love.
Maybe then, the magic will work.

But if you're reading this,
My son,
I fear that it hasn't.

For this,
the words you read,
The paper you hold,
Is my letter, my love, for you.
And I am afraid that this letter will arrive,
One night,
As you sleep in the dark.