

John Foy

Contemplative

for Chris Childers

The birch I point to, even though it's late
to practice any kind of augury,
is right in line with that old apple tree
I look upon beneath the sky and take
my bearings from. It's here I sit and wait,
though who knows why, to see what comes to me
—a crow could be a sign of penury
or something worse to contemplate.

What happens in the temple of the trees
when wind comes through, as if at will, I'm left
to figure out, and then a flight of birds
across the blue above this property
I try to read, but tell me, who is fit
to fix the flying into words?

Funeral

No word really rhymes with *funeral*.
There are, though, some that almost rhyme,
like *useful*, *futile*, *irretrievable*.
And then there's *tuna casserole*, but that's a stretch,
and *urinal* is inappropriate.
I do like *brutal*, *crucial*, *cruel* and *do-able*.
And what's wrong with *denial*?
The director of a funeral home
told me I would leave this *mortal* life.
He was beyond *contemptible*,
but that was long ago, when my father died.
He sold us bogus death certificates
that were, for *legal* purposes, not *usable*.
His cufflinks were *incomparable*.

John Foy

Report Card

I got a B for being there
because I wasn't really there
the night my father died. I was
on business down in Baltimore
and got the message back at home.
I'd been with him that Saturday,
but I was in the hospice, then,
in spirit only when he died.
In sadness, well, I got an A.
It was a mandatory class.

I got a C for taking care
of animals, a dog I had,
but there was nothing I could do
when she was taken by disease.
She went from chasing after deer
and swimming in the Delaware
to lying crippled on the floor
and left on pentobarbital.
I took her body to the car
and got an A in bitterness.

I got a D for doing what
my mother wanted me to do
when she was in her final years.
I gave her all the time I could.
I kept the books and went each week
to see her in a nursing home
that was supposed to be the best,
though it was not a place I'd want
to have to smell for very long.
I earned an A in sorrow there.

An F is what I got for faith.
My prayers were not that regular,
and once a year I went to church,
a failing in the eyes of those

who like to monitor such things,
but if you think of *pain* as *prayer*,
why, I've been at it constantly,
and were I graded on that curve,
then I would get an A and know
that I had earned the grade I got.