

THE SUITOR

Sometimes I'd hear him talking to someone
long after I had read him all the news,
made sure his pills were down, put out the light.

One morning I asked him who. He laughed and said,
"Just polishing the way to court a woman.
I hate to be refused when I'm all ready and eager."

I asked about the lady-- when he met her,
what her name was, where she lived.
"Don't be naive," he said, "we've yet to meet."

"My gripe is with her half-baked surrogates.
I've had my fill of false alarms and pikers. It's her
cold hand I want, no feverish insincere caress, no sighs."

"I crave her toothy grin,
A grip that won't let go. A woman sure
Of what she wants and flat-out wanting me."

I frowned to learn Dad pictured death as female.
His life's relationships had been the best,
his mother, sister, wife--and me. We all had brought

him joys he often spoke of, wrote of. Why would he--
And then I knew. Such close associations
had conjured up the final compliment.

Each day his words became more like a lover's:
"Sweet stroke that changes everything there is.
No other gift on earth is so sincere," I heard him say.

Accustomed to a struggle, even from the weak
and senile wrapped in pain and hopelessness--
what woman could resist his ardent pleas?

Tonight I heard him pause, a muffled privacy exchanged.
My hand froze on the doorknob.
She granted his last wishes as they fled.