



IUScholarWorks at Indiana University South Bend

Mother's Day

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Mother's Day

. . . the day you died.

Mom's hollow voice –
the mostly silent drive across
three mostly empty states ...

– you – father –
waxed, rouged,
your skin parchment ...

They arranged your hands
the way you used to hold them
years ago – a deacon
standing at the end of a pew –
standing – waiting for the offering plate to be passed –
waiting to shuttle it

down the next pew,
back to your partner deacon –
serve – return –
serve – return –

Praise God from Whom all blessings flow ...

But you could not sing.

You could not believe.

Holding your open hymnal
you silently traced the words
while others sang, as if
feeling for a pulse –

While others prayed
you mimicked prayer,
barely murmuring – the way
small children do,
 shadowing adult speech.

Praise Him all creatures here below ...

Mom said, “He looks real natural – like he could just get up and
go to the office. Sandy came in yesterday to trim his hair.
I asked her – how can you work on dead people?
She said – when you touch them, your fear goes away.”

But I could not touch you.

I was afraid –
 afraid that if I touched you,
I might wake you from the dream
you had just become –
 afraid that if I touched you,
you might then know
 that you were dead.

You were the most high-minded,
fierce-tempered, silent man
I have ever known. Only now
do I understand that the part of you
that nurtured and empowered me
was always defined within
your profound estrangement

from so many of life's
assumed possibilities.

Something there was – something
at the center – that you
could never accept:

or was never granted you.

You could not believe.

You could not.