

Grandpa says Grandma makes coffee that could kill a snake,
and I believe him (though it's never killed me).
It's thick, like the heavy mucked water of the Kankakee
and goes down slow, smooth, but strong.

Grandma always has her clear pot full of hot Kankakee
on the electric, black iron trivet,
and I think it cooks so long there's no water left in it —
just coffee, rich running muck.

I fill a yellow melmac cup
and sit to share some talk and listen
with warm cups of river going down.

Grandma laughs, remembering about the river and morels.
She and Old Jim would hunt the May Apples for a pail full,
rinse them off, split,
and then dump them in the cast iron skillet with milk.

Grandpa never eats them because one time
he looked in that skillet and along with the creamy milk
and mushrooms were shiny little slugs. He grins,
course Grandma never minded, she loved morels too much.

With pot in hand, I bring Grandma's cup
(the size of two cups) back to the high tide ring
on the root cracked ceramic inside, and who's Old Jim?

Grandpa draws and puffs on a Phillip-Morris and says
how Old Jim was a river man, one of the last.
He trapped the Grand Marsh
along with the best coon dog in the Kankakee valley.

Grandma sips long and deep, then tells that Old Jim
made the best wild grape wine, too. He'd get grapes from Grape Island
down the river. He kept the cool clear wine buried in a cask
by his cabin. That wine was like spring water, she says.

I could taste that cool wine
like a deep current under the heavy warm
flowing over my tongue.

Grandpa chuckles smoke. He remembers Grandma drinking that wine
like it was spring water one night. She was so warm, she waltzed out
into the Kankakee winter, coat wide open, dancing with the night
as a tall dark partner.

Grandma lightly defends and reminds Grandpa
he liked Old Jim's wild grape wine, too.
They were both warm that night walking back
to their river cabin in the snow.

With a filled yellow melmac cup,
I sit sharing some talk and listening
with all these warm cups of river going down.

glynis 1982



Portrait of Pewter Pitcher

Jill Hunt