

Gentle Dad

Mary Lythgoe Bradford

for Leo Thomas Lythgoe

You chose a wife for her beauty and vulnerability
and planted her in your inherited acre
where your sweat and intuition shaped the fruits
of your coupling. Two girls and two boys looked
to you for instruction.

I, firstborn girl, followed your furrowed field,
dropping seeds and watching shoots. You took me
in the hayrick to collect food for the cows.
In winter you cooked towels on the woodstove
and laid them on my chest before they caught fire.
You believed that ice packs cured sore throats,
that hot bricks in bed blocked the 'flu. You knew
that bright orange segments could chase nightmares
into morning.

When I chose to follow my mother's learning,
you clothed my soul with your body's earnings.
Now, as evening shades your eyes, I take your hands in mine
to give you a daughter's blessing:

Bless you for the nights you stayed me through.
Bless you for the mornings you sang awake.
Bless you for the tears you couldn't hide.
Bless you for the plans you helped me make.

May your last journey carry you
to a world of tillable land
where storytellers chant the ancestors back,
where companions festooned in love
wait to greet you, and work well done
protects you from regret.