

We are all of us Nothing

Katherine Murphy

Take my father, a man of high esteem
at church, the City Court Justice,
the only man of the house. He never left
without a straw or felt hat
he tipped to the ladies, young and old.
On the street he measured equality,
it didn't matter who rang the front doorbell
Sunday mornings, the chief of police
or the neighbor whose husband came home
the night before drunk and abusive again.

We have all of us moved away
from that small town where his family lived
over one hundred years.
They are buried on top of the hill,
facing eastward across the river
where the sun rises.
Who knows them now,
who sees their ghost bone fragments
float from fire burnt to ashes,
the flash of so many days fading.

We have all of us tried to keep him alive.
We loved him and smell his tobacco
scent at dusk, remember
eyes blue-gray as water,
the "Old Lady from Wheeling" limerick,
the Twenty Swedes Ran Through the Weeds
Chasing a Norwegian tale,
and the poem he wrote as a soldier
from his hospital bed,
he was so afraid to die.