*My Papa's Waltz*

[Theodore Roethke](https://poets.org/poet/theodore-roethke)

1908 –1963

The whiskey on your breath
Could make a small boy dizzy;
But I hung on like death:
Such waltzing was not easy.

We romped until the pans
Slid from the kitchen shelf;
My mother’s countenance
Could not unfrown itself.

The hand that held my wrist
Was battered on one knuckle;
At every step you missed
My right ear scraped a buckle.

You beat time on my head
With a palm caked hard by dirt,
Then waltzed me off to bed
Still clinging to your shirt.

<https://poets.org/poem/my-papas-waltz>

*Those Winter Sundays*

[Robert Hayden](https://poets.org/poet/robert-hayden)

1913 –1980

Sundays too my father got up early
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,
then with cracked hands that ached
from labor in the weekday weather made
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

I’d wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
When the rooms were warm, he’d call,
and slowly I would rise and dress,
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,
who had driven out the cold
and polished my good shoes as well.
What did I know, what did I know
of love’s austere and lonely offices?

<https://poets.org/poem/those-winter-sundays>

*Daddy*

* [Sylvia Plath](https://poets.org/poet/sylvia-plath)

1932 –1963

You do not do, you do not do
Any more, black shoe
In which I have lived like a foot
For thirty years, poor and white,
Barely daring to breathe or Achoo.

Daddy, I have had to kill you.
You died before I had time—
Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,
Ghastly statue with one gray toe
Big as a Frisco seal

And a head in the freakish Atlantic
Where it pours bean green over blue
In the waters off beautiful Nauset.
I used to pray to recover you.
Ach, du.

In the German tongue, in the Polish town
Scraped flat by the roller
Of wars, wars, wars.
But the name of the town is common.
My Polack friend

Says there are a dozen or two.
So I never could tell where you
Put your foot, your root,
I never could talk to you.
The tongue stuck in my jaw.

It stuck in a barb wire snare.
Ich, ich, ich, ich,
I could hardly speak.
I thought every German was you.
And the language obscene

An engine, an engine
Chuffing me off like a Jew.
A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.
I began to talk like a Jew.
I think I may well be a Jew.

The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna
Are not very pure or true.
With my gipsy ancestress and my weird luck
And my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack
I may be a bit of a Jew.

I have always been scared of *you*,
With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo.
And your neat mustache
And your Aryan eye, bright blue.
Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You—

Not God but a swastika
So black no sky could squeak through.
Every woman adores a Fascist,
The boot in the face, the brute
Brute heart of a brute like you.

You stand at the blackboard, daddy,
In the picture I have of you,
A cleft in your chin instead of your foot
But no less a devil for that, no not
Any less the black man who

Bit my pretty red heart in two.
I was ten when they buried you.
At twenty I tried to die
And get back, back, back to you.
I thought even the bones would do.

But they pulled me out of the sack,
And they stuck me together with glue.
And then I knew what to do.
I made a model of you,
A man in black with a Meinkampf look

And a love of the rack and the screw.
And I said I do, I do.
So daddy, I'm finally through.
The black telephone's off at the root,
The voices just can't worm through.

If I've killed one man, I've killed two—
The vampire who said he was you
And drank my blood for a year,
Seven years, if you want to know.
Daddy, you can lie back now.

There's a stake in your fat black heart
And the villagers never liked you.
They are dancing and stamping on you.
They always *knew* it was you.
Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.

12 October 1962

<https://poets.org/poem/daddy>

*Nurse*

[Dorianne Laux](https://poets.org/poet/dorianne-laux)

1952 –

My mother went to work each day
in a starched white dress, shoes
clamped to her feet like pale
mushrooms, two blue hearts pressed
into the sponge rubber soles.
When she came back home, her nylons
streaked with runs, a spatter
of blood across her bodice,
she sat at one end of the dinner table
and let us kids serve the spaghetti, sprinkle
the parmesan, cut the buttered loaf.
We poured black wine into the bell
of her glass as she unfastened
her burgundy hair, shook her head, and began.
And over the years we mastered it, how to listen
to stories of blocked intestines
while we twirled the pasta, of saws
teething cranium, drills boring holes in bone
as we crunched the crust of our sourdough,
carved the stems off our cauliflower.
We learned the importance of balance,
how an operation depends on
cooperation and a blend of skills,
the art of passing the salt
before it is asked for.
She taught us well, so that when Mary Ellen
ran the iron over her arm, no one wasted
a moment: My brother headed straight for the ice.
Our little sister uncapped the salve.
And I dialed the number under Ambulance,
my stomach turning to the smell
of singed skin, already planning the evening
meal, the raw fish thawing in its wrapper,
a perfect wedge of flesh.

<https://poets.org/poem/nurse-0>

# Mother and Child

BY [LOUISE GLÜCK](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/louise-gluck)

We’re all dreamers; we don’t know who we are.

Some machine made us; machine of the world, the constricting family.

Then back to the world, polished by soft whips.

We dream; we don’t remember.

Machine of the family: dark fur, forests of the mother’s body.

Machine of the mother: white city inside her.

And before that: earth and water.

Moss between rocks, pieces of leaves and grass.

And before, cells in a great darkness.

And before that, the veiled world.

This is why you were born: to silence me.

Cells of my mother and father, it is your turn

to be pivotal, to be the masterpiece.

I improvised; I never remembered.

Now it’s your turn to be driven;

you’re the one who demands to know:

Why do I suffer? Why am I ignorant?

Cells in a great darkness. Some machine made us;

it is your turn to address it, to go back asking

what am I for? What am I for?

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https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49617/mother-and-child

*Julie Kane & Erica Reid*

[**THE DOUBLE IMAGE REDUX**](https://gicorpsab.cc.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001fhw88AxXdRRg6w7Otv5Xjw1ymUBCtZ_YxnA7CR7y6zNh28y3HgHZnjlclLB4_Dy_WvhyiaCTSoH-vWTPaRXmr8TCRXdAXcroh_NoJCJ1QV8WbN_kjjGPjArun7FAIkzAv_bp3OAsJ_1inRDP8tl2lLEp4DWbuPENsy8YSI1aPe7-urzHQ3C85_JwXjsRB-9d9nUYfG29Lg70WBNWdwLFJQ==&c=kuOm4NujK5LXbHxoUJ2cC3XKxGWzd24RX8009Ukva_Tc_iQWt8FqdQ==&ch=5wImrOxoBmZkuntapLNeglWrYNiYZo0Atg9kI_JOjkoNFw-8MQi6og==)

Turn the photo of your mother in its frame

so she can’t *tsk*her tongue against her teeth:

the cold eyes will follow you just the same—

a trick of perspective like Mona Lisa’s gaze.

Covering her mouth can’t stifle its critiques

when you turn your mother’s photo in its frame.

Drape her face in silk, in rich brocade,

or swaddle her in lambswool. Under the sheath,

her cold eyes will follow you just the same.

Crown her in rubies as the Queen of Shame,

who made you lie in it like piss-drenched sheets

(and no use telling her that you were framed).

You look nothing like her. She stakes no claim

on your nose or brow, your how-may-I-help-you cheeks—

or do her cold eyes follow you just the same?

So hang her image in the Hall of Fame

where you can still gawk up from underneath.

It’s no use turning the photo in its frame—

her cold eyes will follow you just the same.

—*from*[**Rattle #83, Spring 2024**](https://gicorpsab.cc.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001fhw88AxXdRRg6w7Otv5Xjw1ymUBCtZ_YxnA7CR7y6zNh28y3HgHZnukBQqAELimXRTHo1SptMflpciXjFOPrpOZwKvSv1F6elzkx9FFhA8cXDP5tsTQJ0aRVSc7N5s0Xhdu94KBpG4WizK2s2aIALSkJB9BxszVixq_hTFkSe64=&c=kuOm4NujK5LXbHxoUJ2cC3XKxGWzd24RX8009Ukva_Tc_iQWt8FqdQ==&ch=5wImrOxoBmZkuntapLNeglWrYNiYZo0Atg9kI_JOjkoNFw-8MQi6og==)

Tribute to Collaboration

**Digging**

Launch Audio in a New Window

BY [SEAMUS HEANEY](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/seamus-heaney)

Between my finger and my thumb

The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound

When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:

My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds

Bends low, comes up twenty years away

Stooping in rhythm through potato drills

Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft

Against the inside knee was levered firmly.

He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep

To scatter new potatoes that we picked,

Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God, the old man could handle a spade.

Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day

Than any other man on Toner’s bog.

Once I carried him milk in a bottle

Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up

To drink it, then fell to right away

Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods

Over his shoulder, going down and down

For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap

Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge

Through living roots awaken in my head.

But I’ve no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb

The squat pen rests.

I’ll dig with it.

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47555/digging>

### My Father As a Guitar

By Martín Espada

The cardiologist prescribed
a new medication
and lectured my father
that he had to stop working.
And my father said: *I can't.
The landlord won't let me.*
The heart pills are dice
in my father's hand,
gambler who needs cash
by the first of the month.

On the night his mother died
in far away Puerto Rico
my father lurched upright in bed,
heart hammering
like the fist of a man at the door
with an eviction notice.
Minutes later,
the telephone sputtered
with news of the dead.

Sometimes I dream
my father is a guitar,
with a hole in his chest
where the music throbs
between my fingers.

<https://poetrypill.blogspot.com/2010/01/my-father-as-guitar.html>

 <https://www.theatlantic.com/books/archive/2023/10/louise-gluck-saw-the-world-like-a-fairy-tale/675651/>