

## Wilderness House Literary Review 12/3

*Thomas Reynolds*  
**A Lifetime Falling**

Grandfathers are like trees  
fallen in an afternoon  
even if only in memory.  
    And sometimes, maybe, just stumps.

I have one grandfather still alive  
so vile most of the family  
    will not see him.  
He is a stump for sure,  
fallen years ago.

He asked me once at a party  
if I knew now,  
    returned from Iraq,  
how the Arabs were like the Blacks  
    less  
human than the rest  
of us. I don't remember speaking  
to him again after.

My other grandfather died  
before my brain began  
    to form pictures.  
He died a tree so grand  
my father is still afraid of his  
    shadow.  
I'm not even sure if he's  
fallen yet.

I know trees can die standing.  
Is it this way  
with men also?

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**My Father's Father Doesn't Say *I Love You***

And no stories either.  
The only family's other veteran,  
so I'd wanted some to  
compare to my own.

My grandfather was an Air Corpman,  
supposedly guarded food caches  
in North Africa  
with a dog there to help him hold back

the mouths that came.  
I only know that much  
isn't enough. He made  
everyone eat everything

on their plate. Little wonder  
my dad has an eating  
disorder. Strange too  
how I inherited mine

even though we never spoke  
of things directly. I simply  
knew it was good to clean  
your plate. Why didn't he

tell my father how much  
he loved him? It seems he  
used all his strength to  
guard the food, so much he

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never had it in him to become  
casual again about peas  
and carrots.

How much harder it is  
letting go.

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### Here, Compassion

My mother was the box that I came in.  
I saw the ocean break at my toes, first, with her.

The last time I saw her naked in her room  
still red and slick from a shower - we gasped

in time: embarrassed for each other.  
She taught me watching at airports.

We saw past their clothing, the shifting  
bodies beneath and thought

of our own. We studied this tireless  
progression - waiting for our turn to come.

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I was ten when she told me of the man  
who'd raped her. *A belt*, she said, *he used*  
*a belt, and when I woke he'd finished.*

She said she fought him, broke his glasses  
and bloodied his nose, but of course the belt  
had come first: the memory salting to pearl

that grew from the roof of her mouth.  
How long did she wait before she rocked  
back her head to show me its black stain?