

# Granting the Wolf

FOR KEN GOLDBERG

1

There is the friend my age.  
He tells me how often  
he finds himself standing  
on his bed, coming up  
from sleep, while his arms  
continue to shove wolves' heads  
off the mattress. We laugh  
when he tells this story.  
His wife repeats, it's true,  
it's true.

2

In high school  
I was a bone-thin distance runner.  
Mornings, the bathroom mirror  
never failed to highlight each rib.  
  
Ten years past college  
and the body burdens the mind.  
I stand sideways  
and the mirror shows me  
the first degeneration  
of my male breasts. I picture  
what's to come: how they will drop  
into my seventy-fifth year,  
my neck pleated, my hair white,  
my legs offering  
their thin reminder, how

I'd burst the last quarter  
of the County Mile for the gold  
and the lovely grit of victory.

Night has come over the neighborhoods.  
I stretch past the first mile  
and my breathing counts in the clear air.  
Voices from stoops pause as I pass.  
Each step deliberates the street,  
avoids potholes, the spill  
in the backstretch,

the moon-cast shadows  
shattering at my feet.

3

Tomorrow, as I chop vegetables  
for dinner, as my lover  
sets the table  
and Segovia's exact romance  
spins on the stereo, my mother

will call to speak  
of Glenn's wedding, his  
maturity, how someday soon  
he'll have children.

Both of us pause:  
we can see them ascending  
beneath him like birds

into old age.

Once, in Florida  
my friend and I talked till dawn,  
laughing about our great  
adolescent pain. Look with me  
at the gold iridescence of leaves  
in the first explosion of morning:  
it is without sentimentality,  
it delineates each green vein,  
it is without history  
or prediction.

But dusk, like talk, is all  
of these things, dusk that I loved  
as a child in summer, when  
I'd sit with my parents  
after dinner, the air full  
of barbecue and laughter, dusk  
that entered my father  
the evening he died, an aneurism  
screaming in his last thought.  
When I'd seen him three days  
before, he could not speak  
and I knew then the black funnel  
twisting from the period  
of his eye. In twelve years  
I will be his senior.

If I think too much of death  
I turn instead to sunlight  
and watch my lover in the garden  
pulling weeds while her skin reddens  
and the low leaves stir.

Behind her the chickens cackle  
over new eggs, and in the pasture  
six sheep nibble in the shade.

This week, she tells the story  
of new sounds: how one learns  
to recognize the notes of each season,  
how she could tell the shimmering  
tomato leaf from a whistling vine, how  
she'd been rounding mounds  
for cantaloupe one recent day  
when something new was in the air,  
and she rose  
to tour the property.

There, in the back  
acre, an unexpected birth: a lamb  
was learning to speak its first words.

Point is, she says with pride,  
I could tell six sheep  
from five. One must listen . . .

My father's younger brother speaks  
of the incremental losses  
of strength. I think,  
something else to deny!

He is finally gray, and he tells me  
one never likes to work, only  
one must, believe me. I think

of this when the night air  
is cool and I'm pulling beneath me the center of each  
street, working against  
the jeweled ticks of a stopwatch.

It is said little by little  
a shadow appears, rising  
from the lowest horizon of sight  
until it crosses every path.

Today, my father as a young man  
stands in a field  
admiring summer, the good earth.  
Many miles off, death  
approaches like permanent weather.

My lover calls me to the garden.  
We listen  
to the land, the sun raking  
dry winds, the moon rising wildly,  
the empty air always satisfied  
with our words. I grant  
the wolf its moment, watching  
that bad times are not rendered  
by my own false shadows. Now,  
dusk calls me  
from my father's field, says  
before you write, know me.