

MELANIE LIEBERMAN

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Spending Time with Grandpa

Part I

For Never a Veteran

he's been flying cars in his frozen stopwatch sky
brakes with a throttle that's stuck
like a cuckoo bird jammed in the doorway of a clock.

he sits in the passenger's seat of a fully equipped 2007 ford focus
but all he sees are air pressure controls
and wing tips in my side view mirror.

all around him he still thinks it's war
fought while flying over his acres of evergreen
frost tipped and blue like electroshocks through the skin.

it's my first driving lesson, but I'm not learning to fly
trying to navigate the suburbs is harder
when your co-pilot thinks you're dodging artillery shells.

at the top of a hill he urges me to let off the gas – and the brake,
to shift into a lower gear,
so I can coast my cargo jet to a stop on the runway.

there's no use insisting
that cars don't work the same way as jets
or old minds the same as young
that brakes are there to stop just short
of coasting off the edge of a flat sky.

Part II

If You Don't Use Your Words They Disappear

As doctors trace the infection
creeping up from his left ankle
past his plum pudding thighs
and into his cancer-thick stomach.

he takes my fingers into his hand,
while his slick cow tongue sticks on a word,
the ancient vocal chords clucking with the effort
of all his ninety years backing up the system.

a video camera tick ticks on
the corner of a kitchen countertop,
to perpetuate the stories
of this industrial man

his account trickles more slowly
until the cracked gray and white image
of a 1930s New York
deliquesces into cobwebs and dust.

"you know," he says, shifting from one
clogged thought to a new one,
"if you don't use your words they simply
disappear."

and so I try to preserve mine
marking each like chips in a Rosetta stone
before they turn into drops of dew on the back porch
gone as quickly as the sun sheds glow over the world