Poems My Father Taught Me

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I. Once, when you poked your garden hose into a basket of geraniums hanging from the eave, out twirled a shining gray body, a frosty, fanged mouth. You ran to get your hoe while he squirmed from the doused leaves, down the brick wall, away. Tit for tat, you said; one body in, flushes another out. You remember your mother snipped the head off many a moccasin. Did she slip shears in her apron pocket just for that?

II. Crouched in your khakis, with a three-year-old me hanging down your back, you dig holes in earth you have nourished with peat, with moss, mysterious powders. You drop in a daffodil— you pat it into the soil, as you pat your daughters into sleep.

III. Tonight, I find your picture in my bowl of photographs: edges of silver emulsion float your image in Times Square. A photograph marking your escape from the city; your folded land sired you home. Still, I do not see New York without your image there; eighteen, so full of hope, so green.