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Poems My Father Taught Me

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Poems My Father Taught Me

- 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 with-
out your image there; eighteen,
so full of hope, so green.