

Paul Lubenkov

WORDS FOR MY FATHER

Failure is fun and teaches us our names.

Father, you were ripe with wit. I remember your mouth
Gorged with tongue, how your eyes were stung with rust.
You spoke to your fist and shook it in my face.

Dreams, you would say. I hold dreams waiting for freedom.

I tried to imagine your words rising like birds
Beating against the wind. Then you opened that fist
And your hand swept through the sky like a white flame.

Each day you drank yourself closer to death, and I watched.
Waiting for a good word. But I waited for nothing.
You taught me that words were empty threats from the dead,
And your rage brought up blood each time I called you *Father*.

One night you slapped me awake and told me, *Dying*

Is a fact of life. But take it with a grain of salt.

I did, old man, I took you at your word,
And why not? The dead have no claims on the living.

The prayers I promised you rattle like phlegm in my throat.

A stranger to my own blood, I will live out your lies

Forgetting forever the sounds we dragged through dreams,

Cries of vultures beating their wings with love.