

**My Father** (for Itzaak Weinreich b.1903 - d.1988)

My father sold cigarettes to the Nazis.  
Blue-eyed and handsome, he nodded and smiled  
through the coffee houses of Berlin,  
the cakes and the cabaret, a sweet tooth  
and an eye for women. He loved all that.

He told jokes. I read between the lines:  
Buchenwald was his camp - but it was no Butlins!  
He recalled the officer's belt, his polished boots.

I sat by his bed: a big man grown small,  
and stroked his burn scarred arm.  
I traced my fingers along numbers  
the same blue-grey as his veins,  
as if to unlock the stories  
he kept from me.  
I wasn't meant to hear of the baby tossed into the air.  
of the tiny skull cracking beneath the polished boot.

My father loved to polish: the wooden bannisters,  
the brass door handles, the candlesticks - our boots,  
polishing always polishing. And once, only once,  
he upturned the kitchen table, mouth foaming,  
as plates slid cracking to the floor.

He died the year my baby was born.  
He held her in his arms, just once,  
a little awkward, a little shy.  
A big man grown small.  
The line of numbers grey  
as the veins on his thin skin.

I fed him - as once he fed me.  
I stroked his baby head and read to him  
and made him smile at my jokes,  
as his watery eyes were fading.

A year later, on his yahrzeit,  
the Berlin Wall came down.

*Yahrzeit: this is the time of year when Jews light a candle on the anniversary of the death of a close relative or loved one.*

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