

Black Raspberry Jam

Stephen Strobbe

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To Lynn, for everything

Black Raspberry Jam

1.

This is the last jar
of black raspberry jam
that you made with our two boys
when they were young, and blonde,
and you and I were in the summer
of our days, nearly lost and forgotten,
pushed to the back of a shelf
in the pantry.

Those tiny, seeded, purple-black berries,
rarer than ordinary blackberries or red raspberries,
were picked from the bushes that grew wild
on the edge of the woods
that encircled the pond.

We ate almost as many berries as we saved,
staining our fingers and lips.

2.

When I met you, I had already spent
half of my allotted days—many of those
in waywardness—a dissipated life
that damn near killed me,
until I was finally righted,
like a wobbly dharma doll.

I still remember our first kiss.
We were standing in your driveway.
You were wearing a long, floral dress
that was purple, black, and white.

You tipped your head back, and closed your eyes,
the color of coffee with light cream,
and I had my first taste of you.

3.

When we kissed,
and I glanced down along your backside,
I noticed that you had lifted one foot
slightly off the ground behind you,
like a dancer, as if gravity itself
had loosened its hold on us.

That next day, we walked along the river
in the park, and talked about matters of the spirit.
You described how you experienced divinity
through nature, in the miraculous repetition
of geometric forms and patterns,
a creative force and order
in the world. I listened,
was entangled, and enthralled.

4.

We were married one year later,
to the day, and took our honeymoon
in Belize, hiking in the rainforest,
visiting ancient ruins, scuba diving,
and eating lobster. This was just the beginning
of our great adventure.

First there was Joseph, and then David,
a new house, preschool, kindergarten,
elementary school, field trips, camps, conferences,
report cards, a paper route, tae-kwon-do, soccer,
Destination Imagination, a dog and two cats,
church, intermediate school, band,
football, baseball, basketball, track, lacrosse,
mission trips, high school, driver's education,
family vacations in the big, blue Suburban,
homecoming dances, and graduation.

All the while there was still work,
graduate studies, a doctoral degree,
meals, laundry, housework, appointments,
injuries, illnesses, and bills.

All this, and not so much as one poem,
from me to you, until now.

5.

I should know, perhaps better than most,
that everything, absolutely everything,
can disappear in an instant,
and any mortal act could be our last,
so there is some urgency
to what I need to say,
and you deserve to hear.

I had little reason to believe that my life
could turn out like this, filled
with grace, meaning, and purpose.

I do not want another day, hour,
or minute to pass without you
hearing this directly from me,
and letting these words
echo and settle into the deepest
chambers of your heart.

Lynn, you have been,
and are, the best possible woman
and partner for me, and mother
to our sons, two fine young men,
with whom I could not be
more pleased, nor proud.

6.

If I were granted another life,
then I would willingly suffer
all my former ills, even return
for a time to that third circle of hell,
just for the chance to meet you again.

Whatever heaven we create
really exists right here, right now.

I toast a slice of homemade bread,
spread the last of this black raspberry jam
across the top, take a bite,
and savor it: this love,
this life, this world,
so sweet!

25
YEARS
GOLDEN APPLE AWARD

