

## Family Stories of Generations Now Gone

**In today's poem tell a story about older generation loved ones who have passed on.**

Suzanne

At the end of her life  
my grandmother lived  
in a small apartment above  
the barbershop, the ceilings were high,  
the floors oak, the bathroom was in the hall.

Sweet beet soup simmered in the kitchen,  
scrambled eggs and pumpernickel bread  
on the table with one broken leg,  
her cat curled around my feet,  
later I'd watch him prowl the rooftops –  
a dark tortoise shell male, meowing.

The clickety clack, clickety clack of the  
treadle sewing machine hummed  
in the bedroom, and I can remember a story  
she told me about my mother –  
how she made her a special red satin dress  
for a dance at the VFW, and how a bull  
chased her all the way home, dress  
ripping as she jumped the last fence.

Kate Bell

I See You Dancing, Father

No sooner downstairs after the night's rest  
And in the door

Than you started to dance a step  
in the middle of the kitchen floor.  
As you danced  
You whistled.  
You made your own music  
Always in tune with yourself.

Well, nearly always, anyway.  
You're buried now  
In Lislaughtin Abbey  
And whenever I think of you

I go back beyond the old the old man  
Mind and body broken  
To find the unbroken man.  
It is the moment before the dance begins,

Your lips are enjoying themselves  
Whistling an air.  
Whatever happens or cannot happen  
In the time I have to spare  
I see you dancing, father.

Brendan Kennelly  
in *A Time for Voices*: selected poems from 1960 to 1990

### The Great-Grandparents

As small children we were taken to meet them.  
They had recently arrived from another world  
and stood dumbfounded in the busy depot  
of the present, their useless belongings in piles:  
old tools, old words, old recipes, secrets.  
They searched our faces and grasped our hands  
as if we could lead them back, but we drew them

forward into the future, feeling them tremble,  
their shirt cuffs yellow, smoky old woodstoves  
smoldering somewhere under their clothes.

Ted Kooser  
in *Weather Central*

## Parents

My dead parents try to keep out of my way.  
When I enter a room they have already left it,  
gone off to find something that ought to be done  
elsewhere in the house, my dad rolling the Hoover,  
my mother with dust rag and Pledge. At times  
I've heard their old slippers, pattering away  
down the hall, or seen for an instant  
what might be the hem of her skirt as it swept  
through a door. I leave all the cleaning supplies  
where they're easy to find, and they seem to last  
forever. "You don't need to go!" I call out  
through the echoing rooms, but they've never  
turned back. They leave the floors shining  
behind them, and remember to turn off the lights.

Ted Kooser  
in New Poems section  
of *Kindest Regards: new and selected poems*