

RICHARD DEUTCH

*Evening Meal*

*from a draft of "A Christmas Letter to my Father"*

I'd rip myself  
apart for you. I did. I'd be your drunken  
poet champion marked for death, avenging  
your humiliation by arranging my own.  
Evening. *Familiare*. Dinner just starting.  
Mother was carving you up as neatly as  
our knives pulled through the steaks. Little brother was  
  
following her lead, and so was I,  
until I happened  
to look over at you. I stared at you  
as if for the first time; it was the first  
time you were old. You didn't move. Your eyes  
were pinpoints of sheer pain; your cheeks were wearied  
as if by mild, corrosive, steady rain.  
You didn't speak. You didn't even mean  
  
to answer. From then on, I was your man.  
Mother didn't notice  
the sudden shift of loyalty, how I'd gone  
completely quiet. She went right on letting  
you have it, that peculiar look on her face,  
a smirk of triumph, the selfrighteous glower  
of Jehovah the God of Jealousy on Judgment Day  
scarcely containing His mirth at Having His way  
made manifest at last, to One and All.

I couldn't see how I'd ever escape that God  
But I swore I'd flatten any girl who ever  
looked at me as mother looked at you.

And her religion sucked. How I mistook  
your silence, Dad. Mistook myself and you.  
I thought you'd see the change. I was sure, then  
you'd know I loved you. I was eleven or ten.