

Six Poems · Jeffrey Skinner

HAPPY HOUR WITH GRADY

In the middle of distant conversation
Grady winks and lifts his Chivas
and a tiredness settles into his voice.
For once I am fully there,
listening. He talks about the sea,
his tour with the Merchant Marines,
he remembers the money hidden
in his sock, and the late-watch—
looking at city lights
wavering on the black water.
He explains how his wife
was a good mother, attentive
to the details of comfort,
intelligent and fair, but how
whatever once held the center
dropped away the minute
their son kept silent in his room,
their daughter flew off
to school. And his wife
would not say what she wanted
and he could not guess or, later,
care. He had drifted
into his work—Facilities
Management, a section so forgotten
by the big boys that the house
in Greenwich had to go
and he moved into a decent,
bleak four room condo in Stamford.
He was not unhappy: *What good's
ambition*, he said, *ambitious for
what?* He had his books,
real ones, and could afford

the theatre once a month,
a Day Sailor harbored in the Cove,
the best scotch. Then he paused,
wiped his mouth with his hand,
leaned back in his chair. He ordered
another drink and toasted
my new family, my new book,
continued success! . . . *Ireland*,
he leaned in and whispered,
that's where I breathed
easy . . . His grandfather lifting a colt
at eighty, sneaking shots in the
shadows of the feed room . . . He went on
from there in a small voice
and good, I thought, it's
good to hear, to see a man *speak*
in the lean heart of the business
day. The waitress brought our check
on a black tray with two foil-
wrapped mints. Grady opened one
with small pale hands and chewed
as he continued—
he was back at the sea, trying
to explain precisely how it felt
to approach the port of Oslo in May,
seventeen years old, not even the need
to shave yet every morning

BEAUTY AND THE SPIDER

Once women were the beginning and the end of it,
and why a man would rather paint than touch
such skin beyond me. This lasted much too long,
and with luck will continue. At least, the idea.