

Barry Butson

## MY DAD AT THE KITCHEN TABLE

He is always the last one up.  
Midnight man, he shuts down  
our house, turns out the lights,  
locks the doors.           But first,  
he sits at the clean plain of our kitchen table  
chin on fists, sleeves rolled up,  
glass of whiskey at his elbow.  
This is the *only* time he drinks.  
And it is only one drink,  
though no small one ...  
at least three fingers  
mixed with water in an ordinary glass.

As I go off to bed  
I wonder what his mind pursues.  
He is not old so much as ill.  
He can't smoke anymore,  
but what he did smoke has clogged  
his lungs and he can't work  
or even do much around the house.  
There is an oxygen tank in the dining room  
he would prefer to ignore.  
What does he ponder  
at these late night sittings?

Perhaps the same thoughts as Chekhov had  
at home without Olga, as any  
sensitive man has ...  
where did it go? and what next?  
how to say goodbye, any last words  
of advice for the likes of me?

Whatever the thoughts are,  
they do not translate into words.  
My father is silent at the table,

