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,
most comfortable alone and unbothered. He is also content with the bed he has made for himself, has probably lived long enough. He has certainly outlived pleasure and his sons' interest and his daughters' devotion. All the things he loved most he cannot do,

so he takes these still moments with the glass of Seagram's 5-Star as a final treat at the end of each day in these breathless years.

LiNZ