

1974

Remembering and Forgetting

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Recommended Citation

Berg, Stephen. "Remembering and Forgetting." *The Iowa Review* 5.4 (1974): 12-13. Web.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.1751>

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WHO IS IT?

Words drift in, whose I can't say.
It's late. All yesterday
the sun poured itself out over the yards and houses
but it's cloudy now, a small rain
dampens the street. Those words
seem to fly around inside me,
blue wings, blue tails,
whizzing and flapping. Who is it
trying to tell me about her grief?
A darkness only the old
can swallow begins. I taste the bitterness she tastes.
Mine. April. Fuzzy green breasts
everywhere. I sit under them on the steps
in the stunned air, the lamps
open their light
and the stars grow visible and silence
like a hand thrust over my mouth suddenly
covers things human.

REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING

I don't know where my father's ashes should lie.
I drive to the cemetery
to find out
and when I get there,
passing under the gnarled walnut trees
by the church-like crematory fortress, on the office
windowsill there's a box the size
you'd wrap a wine glass in for a gift
with brown paper and string around it
and a white label on top with
Sidney H. Berg
typed on it.

I put both my
hands around it, *him*.
and stand there holding it out in

front of me, staring across the field
of thin stones to the edges of the grass
where the streets and houses begin,
like yesterday
at the supermarket when an old man pushed his cart by
and we smiled
and suddenly
I was studying
the long shelves of bread,
crying, lost.

I look through
the maps of possible graves, telling
the director
what kind of place I want my father in.
Maybe a few bushes and trees around it,
I say, and I think of myself
as bushes and trees.
We step out into the cold to
look for a spot but they're all
friendless, naked to the naked sky,
until I see one next to a row of family stones
fringed by purple bushes
on one side near a few small elms.

All this came back
when that old man went by me shopping and
I heard my mother wailing
her loneliness and rage.
Three black men dug the plot
and placed the ashes, I was told.
I wasn't there. I taught classes.
A windy October day,
the sky a blue cloudless glare.
I hope they lowered him gently
the way they would have if I had been there.
Recently, five months since then,
I asked a sculptress I know if she'd pick out a stone
and carve it into a marker and I'm
still

remembering and forgetting to remind her to do it.