

**Victor Altshul**

## **Deserted by Metaphor**

### I. Inspiration

What is it like not to write a poem?  
It is to live where things are things—  
that is just what grayness is.

Color is what I mean. It just came to me.  
So many things are without color.  
Like when you call a spade a shovel,

you gain nothing in translation.  
That is where I am right now,  
in bric-a-brac really, so much clutter

I haven't found my way to the door.  
I will, though. Just relax. Even now  
I think I hear a wood thrush singing.

### II. Expiration

I swing open the screen door  
and step into the light and heat.  
The call of the wood thrush  
is still faint,

and for that I am thankful.  
What had I thought it could offer me?  
Inspiration through cacophony?  
Listen to its song for a while—  
Schoenberg blasted through a piccolo.

## Too Full for Words

I know a man who lost his daughter –  
a part-time farmer, a reticent sort of fellow,  
not a careless man who loses things easily.  
Two years it took him to lose her,  
as she badly wanted not to be lost  
by him and by so many other  
into whom she'd breathed their lives.

Other losses seemed to follow.  
His chest began to hollow out –  
there was little breathing, doctors said,  
and only the faintest beating.  
Lungs and heart were shriveling  
to make room for a harvest of sorrow.  
His voice grew softer, as you'd expect.  
Maybe he didn't want to let on  
that all that shrinking was happening  
inside his once full chest.  
A reticent sort of fellow – – –  
You'll never get the story from him.

I know he knows it, though –  
I know he has the words for it.  
Maybe he's storing them right there,  
right inside that hollowed-out cavity.  
Maybe he'll breathe them out some day  
when he can hold them in no longer.  
I don't know what will be left of him then.