

Dada- Age 1

by Jennifer Donnell

He keeps saying it,
babbles the term like he knows what it means
and we wince and interject with mama,
mama,
mama,
and joyously raise him over our heads the way
a dada would and make silly faces,
until he erupts in enthusiastic giggles.

And we hope that's enough love,
to get him through the day
when he inevitably wonders
why
and, was it him,
or asks why you didn't stay
the way you wish your own father had
and cries out
from the pain of knowing you didn't love him
more than yourself.

Or, becomes a father himself
and holds his son with the care you couldn't
and hates you
like I hate you, on his behalf.

Even the therapist, with all she knows about human
behavior says, Charlie,
I mean how could anyone not
adore Charlie,
and she looks at him through the eyes a father
ought, filled with joy,
having seen him grow.

But he still makes that sound dada,
dada,
dada,
not knowing you're gone yet,
not knowing he ought unlearn
the word sooner than later,
fast as he can for the both of us.

I turn on the computer and he calls it dada.
My oldest plays peek-a-boo and boisterously
swings him about in his arms, the way men do.
I tell him be gentle, extra gentle,
and he reassures,
mom, I'm pretty much the only man
he sees, I'll always be careful.

And the baby looks up at him and says dada.

