

**CHAD ABUSHANAB**

***Custody Denied***

The subject, *A*, is hereby deemed unfit  
to care for his two sons, *B* and *C*.  
His love, no matter how they want for it,

is problematic. Subject says he quit  
abusing alcohol, but smelled of whisky.  
The subject, *A*, is hereby deemed unfit

for visitation rights, unless observed and split  
between locations found clean and hazard-free.  
His love, even though they want for it,

cannot excuse his sudden, violent fits.  
I recommend a psych exam. See:  
when subject was told he's hereby deemed unfit,

he threatened to beat the social worker, hit  
the table with his fists. She agrees  
his love is toxic. Still, they want for it.

The boys will be removed, pending this writ,  
and cared for by the state of Tennessee.  
The father, *A*, is hereby deemed unfit  
to love, no matter how they want for it.

## *The Phone*

There are things you can't learn over the phone,  
like how each day your mother's losing weight.  
Her hug has turned to a burlap sack of bones.  
You imagine it sharp and cold. Her heart beats

jaggedly. There's dark beneath her eyes.  
You know she cooks herself three meals a day,  
but over the phone you cannot see what lies  
behind her silence: she throws the food away.

She yawns and says she is a little tired,  
while exhaustion settles ashen on her face.  
You can't see how the neatness you admired—  
the dishes clean, everything in its place—

has disappeared. The kitchen's out of order.  
She doesn't make her bed. Her clothes smell bad.  
And you keep moving further, moving forward  
(after dad left, you thought she'd drive you mad):

first Tennessee, then Arkansas, now Texas.  
She's back home in the Carolina foothills  
while the tumor near her cardiac plexus  
grows. You can't see her refuse the pills,

but you hear it in each hesitation, in every  
sick quiet hanging on the line.  
So when she says she's "feeling better, very,"  
it sends the worry ringing up your spine.

After the dial tone dies away,  
you stand in the sunlight of your own kitchen.  
You know she's dying, that she'll never say.  
You know you will never be forgiven.