At Table for Jana

Scott Ward

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At Table for Jana

My first year in school
I purchased the red oak table unfinished.
My own hands smoothed
the rough surface with rasping
sandpaper until the search of both palms
told me the top was smooth and even.
Then I painted on clear varnish, guiding
the brush stroke along the patterned tracks
of the great oak’s girth
and growth’s journey.

This exposed growing
was my reminder of how to fashion
words--my daily struggle
to capture that life--compact, robust
this growing, layered strata
of seasons, both bounty and dearth
encircling, burgeoning, drawing power
from the dark humus of earth
up through that marrow with radical words.

Now it sits in the center
of my kitchen. My wife and I eat supper
on the fine lace table cloth
her parents gave us for our wedding.
As she talks with me
in the evening, her face ruddy
as a fall acorn, shaped
in the candle’s soft halation,
my creased palm resting on the table cloth
feels in that deep grain
the latest round of my living.

Scott Ward