

Good Brains
SpiroAnthony Stathas

Coffee, salad, broccoli,
each meal more important than the next.
The broccoli is never cooked;
he eats it raw.

The sound of soul
a clarinet crying out from the confines of a cassette player.
Alone he weeps and dances
for the place he has left behind.

Forceful breaths,
sucking in life and pushing it out forever.
His daughter didn't want to see his face,
but he was there, watching her leave.

Deep wounds,
as deep as the crinkles get under his eyes after making a wisecrack,
or remembering a favorite Sophocles quote.
He was an orphan then, and he is one now.

His children don't visit.
They find it hard to understand him-
correction, they find it hard to *want* to understand him,
yes, but now his wife appears to him and he speaks to her.

He stopped speaking to his son on Father's Day
and I'm not sure that you would've blamed him either.
He was only a child
but he remembers the day his mother was hung,
by the same people who invaded his village,
by the same people who will become family
and so they think he is hard to understand when he recites his folk poems
about the place he left behind
but he is being crystal clear with them now.

He tells me that grandparents
love their grandchildren more than their own
because they are twice their own children.
It is an old saying
from the place he left behind.

If I tell him I love him
he will wag his finger in my face,

widen his eyes,
and respond:
“*Good brains!*”

My pappou wants me to make good choices.
Sometimes I think he knows
broccoli
tastes better cooked.