

## Michael Brosnan

### Saying Yes or No to One Thing or Another

As long as the living live,  
the dead will die and die again.  
I'm reminded of this this morning  
eating Grapenuts in a hotel in Portland, Oregon.

My mother died two years ago, and I...  
I mourned her more than you'd care to know.  
But over time, I could explain her life and death  
to others in a few short lines.

She died at 84. Just slumped over one night.  
She led a good life, and quit this sentient world  
the way she had hoped: quick and with little fuss,  
in her own home. God rest her soul.

Digging into my cereal, I hear her voice again,  
and see her face as it looked years ago, sitting  
across the breakfast table from me, eating Grapenuts  
out of a white porcelain bowl with pale blue trim,

telling me about the early years of marriage to my father.  
She paused midstory to ask, *What's a grapenut anyway?*  
We laughed hard, too hard in truth, and then it was time  
for me to pack my bag and head home to my own children.

We move on in life — not always out of choice,  
and not always because it's in our nature to move,  
but because we say yes or no to one thing or another,  
and sooner or later we're miles away.

My mother died at 84. Just slumped over one night.  
She was eating an early dinner alone in her beige  
ranch house in the Portland hills. Her cane  
resting over the back of her chair. On the table:

the *New York Times* open to a half-finished crossword puzzle,  
her cordless phone, a plate with a chicken breast,  
broccoli, a buttered slice of bread, a glass of white wine  
with a single, half-melted ice cube floating in it.

**Michael Brosnan's** poetry has appeared in various literary journals, including *Confrontation*, *Borderlands*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Barrow Street*, *New Letters*, and *Ibbetson Street*. He makes his living as the editor of *Independent School*, an award-winning quarterly magazine on precollegiate education. His book, *Against the Current: How One School Struggled and Succeeded with At-Risk Teens* (Heinemann), was the basis for the 2009 documentary film *Accelerating America*.