

# Conjuring

by Regina Buccola

*for James Baker Hall*

The shock of white hair suffused into a halo around  
the birdlike face, features whittled into inquisitiveness;  
your clothes seemed to float on your lithe frame,  
even your wedding band spinning, hypnotically, around a  
finger that shrank away from the knuckle as  
you held your hand poised in the air in front of you  
like a conductor: head bowed, eyes closed.

From somewhere deep inside of you,  
you conjured the words to “My Papa’s Waltz,”  
speaking every syllable with the reverence of a prayer.

You showed us how to open ourselves to poetry—  
to prostrate ourselves before it. Knowing full well  
that we would craft nothing of value without  
the proper respect, the appropriate awe.

You carried us like pebbles in your pocket,  
wearing the rough edges smooth. You knew us,  
all: each particular variation of shade and shape.  
In your presence, people became more themselves  
than they ever knew they were, knew they could be.

When I stand, now, in front of my students  
wanting them to receive this benediction—  
if you try to bend words to your wills, their  
backs will be broken and they will fall, lifeless—  
I extend my hand over them, and conjure  
your words.