

# Look What I Bought You!

I come in tired  
from baseball practice, and Dad catches me  
guzzling OJ right out of the carton.

“Want a journal?” he asks. “You’re a writer.  
All writers need journals.”

I put the orange juice away and hold out my mitt,  
the one Mom bought me. “I’m a first baseman.”

“Who used to write poetry. Your teammates  
called you Shakespeare.” He hands me a notebook.  
“And it doesn’t have to be poetry. It doesn’t  
even have to be a journal. It could be a diary.”

He lays it on the table, opens to the first page, and writes  
with his favorite gel pen: *Shakespeare’s*

*Secret*

*Diary*

Maybe I should start again. I play ball a lot, because if I  
don’t, I get rusty.

All I need now are some secrets.

## Non-Secret #1

The batting cages are on Bellefontaine.  
Dad takes the twisty-turny frontage road.  
That way we get to see the backs of things:  
a bunch of crows line up like bitter verbs,  
some tattooed guys check out a custom ride,  
two kids with flashlights practice being spies.

Once there, Dad's cell lights up and plays a tune.  
The first few bars, at least. He turns away.  
"Yeah, hi. Of course. I'll call you in a sec."  
I take my bat and use the resin bag.  
Dad gives the guy who runs this place a ten.

A practice swing or two, and then I'm good.  
I set the speed for thirty/thirty-five.  
I want a baffling, sharply breaking curve.  
I want a knuckler with a wicked drop.  
I want to hit the sweet spot every time  
and bring the roaring crowd right to its feet.

I look around. All guys, all serious,  
all twice as old as me. Except one girl.  
She's maybe nine, with diamonds in both ears.  
Her dad adjusts her goofy stance. Mine talks  
to someone I don't know. He starts to grin.

I up the speed to forty-five. I try  
to burn holes in the net with red-hot drives.  
At last I get deep in the zone. It's great!  
And then it's gone. I miss three in a row,  
then chop a fastball down the first-base line.  
The guy a cage away gives up some props:  
"You got a bread-and-butter swing, my man."  
"I'm not so sure. Those last ones weren't so hot."  
"Trust me: if you can run, you got the tools."  
I find my dad, who says, "You looked real good  
this time." He musses up my hair. He turns  
my hat around. He walks me to the car.

## Duty Calls

At home, I have to call Mira.  
Do I want to? Sort of.  
Do I have to? Absolutely.

First, I find my thesaurus  
and look up a couple of words:  
*preference* and *necessity*.

I love my thesaurus. I like  
to think about all the words  
in there, cuddling up together  
or arguing. Montagues on  
one side, Capulets on the other.  
Synonyms and antonyms.

Dad was right. Writing is fun.  
There's nobody besides  
this diary I can talk to  
like this.

Not the guys I play ball  
with and for sure

not Mira.

## The Only Child

In their living room, Mira's  
parents have these paintings:  
Mira looking gorgeous,  
her mom looking noble,  
her dad looking serious.

Then there's this big one  
of the whole family.

You know how in most pictures  
people look out, like at the camera  
or the painter?

In this one, only Mira does that.  
The other two look right at her.

They're the bookends.  
She's the first edition.

## The Actual Call

“What’d you do today?” Mira asks.

“Took some batting practice with Dad.”

“I went to dance class. It was hard.”

I’ve got a zombie movie on mute.  
I picture those guys in tutus.  
A little too much allegro,  
and body parts start falling off.

Baseball is more fun than ballet.  
(Okay, maybe not more fun than  
*Swan Lake Zombies*.)

“Did you get hits?” she asks.

“At the cage? Yeah. I did.”

We listen to each other listen  
to each other breathe. I can’t  
tell her I wrote blank verse  
about batting practice.  
She thinks blank verse  
means a poem about nothing.

## Dad's Somewhere

and he wouldn't mind, anyway,  
so I go into his studio and borrow  
some printer paper.

I like it that's he's "somewhere."  
Not a secret exactly; he just doesn't  
tell me.

He doesn't nag me, either, about  
where I'm going. He knows my friends.  
He knows I'm not going to do  
anything stupid.

I'm basically a good kid. But imperfect  
enough to be interesting.

Like a good poem.

## Like Father Like

I don't bother to hide this diary  
(which is actually a red spiral  
notebook) because Dad's no snoop.

We're kind of like roommates. His  
stuff and my stuff. His life and my  
life.

Except for our DNA. Ours.  
The polymers and nucleotides.  
They'd know each other anywhere.

There's this guy I play ball with sometimes,  
a center fielder with a bazooka arm, who  
hates his dad. Hates him. Takes  
the field all hulked out. Cusses  
and spits.

Know why? Because his dad cusses  
and spits.

My dad reads and writes. Except  
for baseball, that's what I do.

# My Dad the Sorcerer

I like how he trashes his books.  
You'd think a writer wouldn't do that.

Does A-Rod ever leave his Yankee  
jersey outdoors, much less his steroids?

Dad's books are everywhere. Like  
his favorite pocket dictionary.

In the rain. Then the sun. It's  
as wrinkled as an elephant's butt.

And he loves it. Here's the best part:  
it's completely out of order.

Pages go any old place: 57 next  
to 109. *Z*'s next to *K*'s. *L*'s beside *C*'s.

I ask him, "How can you use that?"  
He's serious when he says, "Divination."

I have to look that up—"insight via omens  
and supernatural powers."

## Poetry 101

The stanzas in “My Dad the Sorcerer” look like couplets, but they’re really just two lines lying down together.

Couplets gallop (iambic pentameter, for the record) and they rhyme.

I went downtown and bought a little hat.  
I took it home and put it on my cat.

That’s a couplet. And here’s the funny thing: perfect meter and perfect rhymes get boring after a while. So what’s a poet to do?

Mr. Beauclair, my English teacher, put this on the board the other day:

Wounded, the soldier staggered toward the barn.  
His feet were numb, his uniform was torn.

The first line staggers just like the soldier, and *barn/torn* clash a little because this isn’t a pretty scene.

Then he made us go through the poems in our textbook and look for stuff where the “mistakes” were perfect.

He calls rhyme a benevolent bully because it'll make a poet look hard for just the right word and then maybe he finds an even better one!

There's a guy—Morton Gluck—who plays for OSH and he's a bully. Rides Fabian and me constantly, and there's nothing sweeter than shutting him up with a standing double. Would I concentrate that hard if it wasn't for him?

Morton Gluck. Imagine waking up every morning in a house full of Glucks.