

the toad has never heard of me
and i've been reading his poems since college,
yet he's gentlemanly and attentive,
giving me copies of his books,
telling me the names of editors
i ought to try when i get home.

i wait for him to bait me,
to size me up and slice me down,
but he's just interested
in where i've published, what i know.

no real surprise, of course.
it is the most consistent rule
i've learned about writers:
the poet who's feted for his gift of tongue
is only looking for a lay,
the guy you're sure will be a prick
is generous and kind.

THE LADY LE GROS PUB

i get on stage and do my schtick.
a few to make them laugh,
a few to make them think
i've looked inside myself.
okay. not bad.
i slouch back to my pint of bass,
happy i didn't choke.

the toad lugs an armload
of books up to the podium.
for forty-five minutes
he calmly delivers the goods,
his breathing labored
above the laughter and applause.

his final poem
is unexpectedly solemn.
"that last one,
about your father's death,
really kicked my ass,"
i say when he is through.

the toad stares at me
through lenses thick and smudged.
he doesn't say a word.
he doesn't have to.