

PATRICK CARRINGTON

DEAD MAN'S FLOAT

There are tricks we need to know,
and I believe in magic.
I wouldn't be here to pass on the sleights
if my father hadn't used up a perfect
summer day to teach me
the dead man's float, to show me
there's more to it than buoyancy.
It's a frame of mind, making
swells a palm. A philosophy of rising.

Through me, my children will know
that the dead still have something
to teach about living. They talk
from the dirt because you can't bury words.

Tell them about trains and hobos, he said
and says now from the ground
as I leave him the lilacs
he taught me to grow. Tell them

what men searched for riding the rails.
They need to know rebirth
is never one too many towns away.
Make them understand why
they wouldn't pay the fare, why salvation
must not be priced. And survival—

teach them to search, to find the way
to a soft kiss at midnight,
to hands that slip under
and hold your head up like the sea.