

Going Home

Loretta Randall Sharp

“Walk,” scold your doctors, but you snort
that it will take a cold day in hell
to make you shuffle from room to room
like some old man. So here I am,
newly flown to the sick bed and volunteered
by Mom to get you out of the house.
Three tries, and you’re upright,
swaying like that long-ago copper woodpecker,
its beak picking up toothpicks
as you finished off your weekly catch
with beer and pickled pigs feet.
That woodpecker tarnished too black
for polish and long ago thrown away,
that red oilcloth with windmills on it gone,
the wood table covered with thick white paint—gone.

Mom puts on your shoes, checks the ace-banded legs
and the tape over the drain bottle,
then buttons you into an overcoat.
She gives you the cane for your left side;
I am the right brace, one hand, flat padding
beneath yours, the other gripping your arm.
I do not know how a five-legged walk is to go,
but the cane knows. It moves first, and we lean
into a step. And then the next, the cane
steadying itself in the first frozen skiff of snow.

LORETTA RANDALL SHARP is currently at the Taipei American School. She has recently received a 1989-90 Creative Artist Award from the Michigan Council of the Arts to complete a manuscript of poems about women and goddesses of India.

Once again, I am going along for the ride,
like that child who went each week to Skinner's Meadows
so you could catch another twelve fish.
That young girl with her paperbacks and orange Nehi
should still be in the deep grass dreaming
of getting away from the Copper City,
from beer and Hormel brine speckling your shirt sleeves
till they glistened like the Rainbows threaded
with wire and left cooling in the stream.
But here she is, steadfastly looking away
from her father gutted, sewn up again,
then turned loose to swim upstream. Here she is,
quickenened by the rhythm of your hand jerking free
at each step, then plunging down, finding surcease
in her palm, again and again in a silent,
ungainly dance, no one speaking, you stripped
to only the essential motions, I rigid
as Gandhi's walking sticks, as Antigone,
as Lot's daughters, each of us caught
by fear palpable as salt brine, each
yielding to the inexorable season of love.