

“after work at four in the morning” received an *Ascent Aspirations* Honourable Mention.

### after work at four in the morning

i take the curve in the bridge push the bug up to forty ready for  
not much more than bed what with the price of gas and the  
youngest needing braces and no raise again this month and  
there she is perched on the railing long stringy hair knee  
hanging out of her jeans and i stop just stop the car right there  
on the bridge she throws her arms out to the sky raises her  
head so i open the door and just stand there she's hanging  
alone against the sky like that in all the silence and the stillness  
and the grey light she arches like a diver and i run and run for  
the railing all i can see is the black shadow of the bridge and  
there isn't a sound not a sound nothing

### They're boarding up the IGA today.

She stops and leans on her cane, glad  
to have support. Second time in eighty years  
she's felt the neighborhood leave her behind.  
First, Joe passed on. Her Joe. Childhood  
sweetheart, as they say, husband, lover,  
friend.

She'd stood here – no cane, not  
then – a week after Joe's funeral, watching  
couples, parents with young children, rushing  
past, and could not hear a sound. Apart  
from everyone, she felt herself grow old,  
the part of her he filled grow dark. That day  
it took her by surprise.

The same sadness  
fills her now, a second time. She watches  
as they fix the wood in place, recalls  
the signs on every second house,  
“For Sale.” The hardware, closed. Bookstore  
where, off work at three, she rode the bus to meet  
her Joe, before the cancer took him: gone. So small  
a pleasure, now denied. The final nail

as workmen load their tools and drive  
their half-ton truck away. The bus roars by.  
A mother pulls a dark-eyed laughing  
girl along. They share a smile. The woman  
turns, lays her cane over her arm, to  
shuffle home. She breathes the air. Late  
blooming lilies line her path.