

Luctus

by Peggy McCarthy

We'd stare at my father's left hand
slicing up and down, his elbow pivoting
on the oilcloth, voicing words on the supper table
when sentences dried up and broke.

We'd watch him slump behind the rump
of a cow in the milking stall, her jaws
grinding as he clutched her bulk,
head buried in her soft flank.

We'd wait for him on an August evening
having marooned himself in a vast cornfield,
the scythe working him - lift, swipe, slash,
felling the crop till well beyond nightfall.

We'd track him hauling buckets from barn
to churn, trailing splashes of cow-hot milk,
precious drops creaming dark clay.
He lingers yet in any desolate man I see.