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Recovery Novelty

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Recovery Novelty

Liz Whiteacre

Dad offers Grandpa's cane,
with the ornate golden dragon's
head, the glass flask hidden

inside its wooden shaft. This isn't
the cane Grandpa used most often
after knees' parts were replaced

with metal and plastic bits,
but one given as a gift, half joke,
half awe, that passed to Dad

after Grandpa passed away.
I've just graduated from crutches,
I'm home on holiday, and I try

the dragon in my palm. Its cold
and pokey, too narrow, and its shaft,
while polished and mahogany-hued,

too short. No doubt, Grandpa rejected
it for these same reasons -his great hands
could smother my own and he towered

over me. I favor the sturdy cane I carry,
laminated with a brown and black
wave pattern, bought at a medical supply

store in a Carbondale strip mall.
It's candy-cane shaped and arched nearly
at my hip. I lean the golden dragon,

nostrils flared, against the hearth
and am reminded of the stand
it rested in with other novelty canes

at my Grandpa's home. Try as I might,
I cannot conjure the image of his daily cane
-was it aluminum or wood- this third

leg I knew that helped him swagger
to my school plays, ballet recitals,
midnight church services in Decatur,

the dinner table my Grandma set
-it remains translucent in my mind
when I picture him, like the exact hue

of denim jeans he liked to wear, the exact
twangy song playing on the tinny bathroom
radio, the L'Amour or McMurtry titles

that sat on his side table. The details
have faded like so many snowflakes
on the panes tonight, but when I feel

my cane's heft, its smooth curve pressed
into my palm, the confidence of my stager
to the table, I remember his grace, the affectionate

poke he gave Grandma's bottom when she served
dinner, the grip of his hand when we played
later while the dishes were cleared: he'd grab

my fist and I'd pull and pull to let go
and he'd laugh until his fingers sprang open,
catching me, always catching me, before I fell.