



## A PLACE FOR POETRY —

### THAT M WORD

—RICHARD CUMMINS

*For Meg*

My wife rolls over me slowly,  
like I'm a speed bump, off the couch  
where we have been dozing by TV light.  
All weekend long the rain has come  
in horizontal blasts against the windows,  
wind gusting to 50 mph.  
On the other side of the house,  
our daughter grows another inch in her sleep,  
the skid-proof feet in her blue jammies  
strain at the stitch.

"I've been feeling odd all weekend,"  
my wife says, "not melancholy,  
though the word I want starts with an M."  
I've had something tugging at me for a week –  
mostly a loneliness for my daughter  
while I'm at work, a realization  
that a great sadness in life is in living  
most of it apart from your family.  
This past week, in the dentist's chair,  
as I was drifting through a novocaine haze  
induced by the white noise  
of the dental assistant's sump pump in my mouth



and the mincing motions of the dentist's hands,  
I started on the precipice of sleep  
and felt the only prayer an atheist  
could bring himself to say:  
I hope to die decades before my daughter.

My wife continues:

"I've been feeling something  
so poignant about living here,  
in this house, with you and her,  
happy to go on this way  
in our small town with our small lives,  
even though sometimes it feels like a trap,  
even though we get to travel and read.  
But there's something scary  
About becoming so simple."  
On the tip of her tongue,  
she still can't get the word to fall out  
and I watch her turn out the kitchen light  
behind her on her way to bed,  
and I whisper to myself: "Marriage."