

Betsy Struthers

RISING FOG

"I must go in; the fog is rising" – Emily Dickinson

So often I've driven, been driven down this road,
I should be used to the nursing home by now.
But this: push open my mother's door
to find her slumped, a blue sheet tenting her
from head to toe. My touch makes her jump,
she yells, *Give my hallucinations back*, the ones
the new drug threatens to dispel – Dad has come
to take her home, her dog snuggles in her lap.

*I used to do so much, I'm just an empty hole,
a smudge.* She thumps the wheelchair's
arm. Her choice: to scream or weep. She
claws my stroking hand with yellowed nails.
The sheet slides off, bares bruises on her shins –
she's fallen once again. At last, she calms, picks
at the chocolates I brought her, lets me read
out loud her book. Drifts in and out of sleep.

I have to leave her there. I have to leave.
On the bus on the highway home, haunted
by the vision of her fists clenched tight,
the look she shot me when I stood to go.
Focus on the view: an owl hunched
on a hydro pole, six crows, a kite of geese.
And over the lake: fog. Over the moraine: fog.
Over the rattling pane: fog of ragged breath.

