

E.G. BURROWS

Thorn

The cougar stood just there,
form curved to accommodate
scrawny ilex and the chickadee feeder.
Neighbors were bulldozing their lots,
driving their yellow machines
back and forth to erase
anything suggestive of green.

They wrestled with jimson weed.
They nudged blades to our fence,
daring the chain-link to snap
and the jays to come within birdshot.
They could not imagine a lion
except as a yawn on the wall
or a Disney cartoon character.

But he was there like a photo
washed in sepia and firelight,
dogeared by tall tales.
He had come down from the bitter rocks
and sour mountain to stand
patiently with one paw raised.
But I knew if I reached out

to pull the thorn, he would vanish
into the granite of a gatepost,
one of the guardians of libraries,
for all his pain would dissolve
into the idea of sanctuary
and my meaningless good wishes,
my panther, my good black dog.