

Physics · *Jeanne Murray Walker*

The doors of the long semi-trailer truck
swing shut. A kid stands on the dock,
easing off his gloves, watching the tires roll,
hearing the engine grumble as it leaves
for one of those flat middle states,
dragging a hundred cardboard cartons labeled Grief.
Turning, he smears his red face with his shirt
and hoists another carton to the jaws
of another patient truck. His arms
are levers. His legs uncoil like springs.
In this gray town where houses are devoured
by ravenous black slate hills they cannot
help but cling to, grief is everywhere.
It rises out of chimneys, smelling like woodsmoke.
It airs its mug on new TV serials
and tackles his skinny brother
playing kickball in the vacant lot.
It settles in the blackened shack
that crazy William set on fire one night.
It crowds out asters like quack grass
and lifts its leg at the fire hydrant.
In prayer meeting grief scuffs its boots
on the pew it kneels by.

The kid
can't ship it out of town fast enough.
He swings his long legs over the dock during break.
They dangle weightless in a blaze of light.
He thinks about the only physics he has seen:
the love that bonds all elements
in their perpetual dance is grief.
He won't believe it, because he knows
how it might feel to sail over the rim of houses
into light. There nothing is held down
by the black fist of gravity.

Beyond the dock, beyond the roads, beyond
the tar paper roofs, beyond the stubble fields,
seething on the horizon, he sees
brilliant as a burst vein in his eye
a light that will not go away.
He blinks and blinks but it stays, as though
it were the lever to lift the city by.