## Hanging on Like Death · Michael Van Walleghen

The Octopus? The Tilt-a-Whirl? Whatever it is, it begins

in the twinkling of an eye to look like so much junk-

but it's too late by then. By then, the jumpy alcoholic

who collects our tickets has also strapped us in.

You'd have to be a little kid to trust this thing. Tools,

sinister, odd scraps of metal scattered in the oily grass...

this ride looks absolutely murderous. "Hang on now."

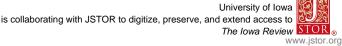
I tell my daughter. "Hang on." What else is there to say

when the Octopus has got you? Or suddenly, some cold, grey morning

a lavender, Chevrolet Impala with different colored doors

jumps the twisted guardrail and then comes sliding toward you

sideways, down the interstate. You'd have to be four years old



and afraid so far of nothing in this life but monsters

big dogs and snakes to trust this hanging on, this tilting world

about to vanish, this carnival we almost missed—and *would* have

except for sheer dumb luck and the kid who pumped our gas

and answered all our questions by pointing here and there

along the flickering horizon with a lit cigarette.