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Gradual Retirement

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Cover Page Footnote

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Anthony Liccione

Gradual Retirement

Albert sat back in his leather recliners feeling tired,
Though, he did nothing to weary him today
It felt right to put up his legs and lay back
To the crackling wood in the fireplace.
He was still holding onto his walking cane
Sitting in the chair with the orange glow of fire
Illuminating his face. He hardly noticed the warmth
From the flames licking his old body,
It was second nature to him since those days of work.
Through the window, he saw Mrs. Carrillo cursing and
Swinging a broom at icicles hanging off the edge of her roof.
Her husband retired from farming when the
Government took part of their land for back taxes,
Shortly after the time they passed that silly
Potato Control Act in '35 when potatoes hit \$1.14 per bushel.
She would come over crying,
"They come enna takka my lan,
En now my husbin' dunno whatta do."
He found a trade in lumberjacking.
The icicles dangled like a top mouth full of
Sharp teeth ready to close on the little Italian woman.
He detested ice no matter what form it came in.

Those were the days when he exchanged
The ice-cold ice for heat. Remembering back how
He and his father worked like slaves
Hauling slates of ice in that wrecked truck
During the Depression you did not complain,
Seventeen cents per haul filled stomachs and starved egos.
For five years, he dragged ice up
And down stairs, flights of stairs, throwing it into
Those dark ice sheds, thousands of pounds
Every summer until he was twenty-two. The numb
Soon left his fingers after quitting. He took a job at the
Steel plant as an ironsmith, where he melted down lithium
And iron in large hot furnaces. He retired forty years later
With a good pension and burn scars on his hands and arms.

A year later after hanging up his ice gloves, he
Met Mary at the market, a small woman with
Pleasant eyes that needed help with her grocery, he
Offered to assist in carrying her bags of potatoes to her
Wagon. Both fell in love and married the following
Year, she then carried his son for nine months.

The government taker took their son and
Sent him off to Que Son to fight Viet Cong,
Seventeen-year-old snatch in high school-
They put a Browning in his hand
And crossed tags around his neck.
Almost forty years now-
You could still hear the guns being fired
Helicopters and planes swarming by
And the news reporters cutting through static airwaves
"4 dead and still. . ."
"7 more died today after an. . ."
"6 soldiers went down after their plane. . ."
The radio was always on,
He sat with his wife in tears
Praying it was not her Timothy.
Their son never came back home. . .
Never came back. . .
They sent his tags in a violet velvet box
And a sympathetic messenger
As thin as his son told them
His body was missing in action,
Apologies for a brave young soldier.
Mary screamed, "No, no. . .God no, no. . ."
The thin man pulsed her hand.
They later engraved his name
On a veterans monument
With fifty-eight thousand winners. Albert would argue
That his son won the war,
They all won though they lost their lives.

By this time
Mary never came to see her son's dedication
Carved in stone.
She passed years later one winter
When her brakes failed her at Pearl Avenue

And River Wind Road. Ice took hold
Of her tires and slid her into an unexpected tree. She
Died two days later from severe hemorrhaging.
She whispered to Albert she was tired with frail lips-
The same lips that he kissed forty-eight hours previous
The same lips that told him she loved him before she
Left to pick up her prescriptions for her sleeping difficulties.
Albert took her by her hand and told her to take her rest
And he'll be right here when she awakes; he'll be waiting. . .
. . .She never said goodbye

The flames dies down in the fireplace
And the logs were now glowing and wheezing, he knew
Soon the warmth will retire and leave particles
Of ashes floating in the air. . .he was too
Tired to give the sparks fresh wood. It was better to let
The fire extinguish, and in the morning,
He will sweep the ashes clean.
Thinking on this, his eyelids finally gave out
And his cheek tilted to his shoulder. As
His chest continued rising and falling in slow rhythms
The cane lost its grip and fell to the floor.