

MICHAEL V. SMITH

## PRETENDING SLEEP

On nights my grandparents drove  
home to their bungalow  
on Rideau Street, Kemptville, Ontario  
with crickets scissoring their legs at every  
stop sign the Nova met, wind whistling  
to a tune my grandmother pulled  
fresh from the air the dark  
delivered to the curve  
of her tongue

I would feign  
sleep for the feeling of my  
grandfather's arms collecting  
my body from the dog-haired  
back seat. The warmth of his torso  
matched mine. His evening stubble.  
One hand beneath my backside and  
the other along my spine. The pretend  
of my eyelids lightly shut.  
The crunch of gravel, five  
paces over cement tiles  
to the wooden deck, three steps up  
and two more to the door, propped  
open by my grandmother.  
No lights in the house, whispers  
about where they'll put me, am  
I still asleep, do they bother  
with pyjamas, here, leave his shoes  
by the door.

Lit by the dark  
the deep smell of leftover  
ground beef and onions  
in a cast iron pan, boiled icing  
and vanilla cake. He sails me  
in the ship of his arms  
through the kitchen, the dining room,  
down the narrow hall, past the large  
wooden coat rack and the front door  
sealed in old plastic. We climb  
the oak stairs for too long  
to be believed, the sweetness  
of that time between floors  
made moreso by the dread  
of the last four paces,  
which deliver me  
to the spare bed. My body

cold everywhere  
my grandfather no longer is,  
like a wisdom the body knows  
of what the future does  
and doesn't hold.