



A PLACE FOR POETRY ———

THAT M WORD

—RICHARD CUMMINS

For Meg

My wife rolls over me slowly,
like I'm a speed bump, off the couch
where we have been dozing by TV light.
All weekend long the rain has come
in horizontal blasts against the windows,
wind gusting to 50 mph.
On the other side of the house,
our daughter grows another inch in her sleep,
the skid-proof feet in her blue jammies
strain at the stitch.

"I've been feeling odd all weekend,"
my wife says, "not melancholy,
though the word I want starts with an M."
I've had something tugging at me for a week –
mostly a loneliness for my daughter
while I'm at work, a realization
that a great sadness in life is in living
most of it apart from your family.
This past week, in the dentist's chair,
as I was drifting through a novocaine haze
induced by the white noise
of the dental assistant's sump pump in my mouth



and the mincing motions of the dentist's hands,
I started on the precipice of sleep
and felt the only prayer an atheist
could bring himself to say:
I hope to die decades before my daughter.

My wife continues:

"I've been feeling something
so poignant about living here,
in this house, with you and her,
happy to go on this way
in our small town with our small lives,
even though sometimes it feels like a trap,
even though we get to travel and read.
But there's something scary
About becoming so simple."
On the tip of her tongue,
she still can't get the word to fall out
and I watch her turn out the kitchen light
behind her on her way to bed,
and I whisper to myself: "Marriage."