

September Morning, 3 A.M.

by Mary E. O'Dell

Beneath this room is a river
quietly rushing backward
carrying me like the turtle that carries the world.

Suddenly it is Saturday morning, hot and dusty.
I wait, surrounded by my childhood.
My father appears in his brown work pants

keys jingling at his belt
a pack of Camels in the pocket of his shirt.
He hoists me to his shoulder

and strides down the gravel road
to the plant where he works weekdays.
The men at their oily machines

are glad to see him
and smile when he starts a joke or a yarn.
Their own stories hang ready in their throats.

They know their turns are coming.
I am not impatient. It is enough to be here,
breathing in the oily scent of clanking metal.

Soon, someone will smile
and give me a stick of Wrigley's Spearmint,
a ball bearing or two for the pocket of my overalls.

This life is real and safe
like snapshots tucked into dusty attic albums.
Let me stay here, Lord,

till the rain falls down and everything comes clear.