

APRIL LINDNER

Eden Estates

On the narrow porch they sit, and wait, and sit,
in wheelchairs, behind walkers, too many
like goldfish who crowd the surface
for flecks of food. They eye their rectangle
of lawn, the single palm cupped by a sky
so blue it hurts. Sometimes a bicycle
hums past or a car blunders by
blurred with motion they hunger after.

When I drive up, each face tugs mine,
hoping I've come to share hoarded peppermints.
Her face among theirs —
still her face, but sunken and dull —
takes a while to light with recognition.
Happy to see me, she can't stop crying,
her gnarled hand on my arm
softer than it looks, softer than talc.

We head for the beach. She sits at my side
watching the sea like a stage.
I want to hear her stories once more:
the passage from Naples to Brooklyn,
how her mother scrubbed floors for money
and left her with the Sisters for safekeeping,
but found a husband and came back
to bring her home. The sun full on her face,
she shuts her eyes and won't speak
of the past, won't pretend any future.

I don't know how to say it's time to leave.
The boardwalk quavers with heat.
In plain flat shoes she must hate,
she's steadier than she looks.
As I drop her off, I bend for a kiss
and she clutches me, strong with longing
to hold me here against goodbye
in this fishbowl of wan and watching faces.