**Ghostwork**

Angela Williamson Emmert

He may have already been dead, in the war or in childhood, a ghost

roaring down the road on an antique tractor used for pulling wagons

between field and barn. I was a child perched behind him, one hand

gripping the rusty wheel guard, the other pinching the back of a bowl-

shaped seat, fingers folded away from the coiled iron spring hungry

to crush them. The three-inch wide running bar made groves

in my cheap shoes, kept me from sliding as the black road blurred

beneath us, pin spinning in the hitch. What if, one day, I slipped?

The wagon swerved figure eights like a two-ton dancer pulled

on a string. What if I am dead beneath her? What if, one day, I let go?

After he died, crushed by a tractor turned over on a road, I dreamt

I found him by the barn, wild-eyed, unhinged, how he looked after

racing the rain or repairing machinery determined in its obstinance

to destroy us. He was holding a cow by the neck, urgently

slurping blood from a sliced vein. He said to me, *I’m working*

*out how to get back.* I woke in horror, to this life, where

on a Catholic Sunday my sons fill a pew, and an old woman behind me

counts them to four. Her voice grates the walls of her deep-welled

dementia when she asks, *Are you using birth control?* and answers, *Oh,*

*you are now. That’s good. That’s good.* Later, in the living room, my boys

play a game with a white balloon. The youngest leaps the sofa, bumps

it upwards, where, for a moment, it floats.