**Mother Weeding the Driveway: 1964**

Katherine Szpekman

Summer evenings,

dinner dishes done,

after the rain,

the chocolate earth lay

in soft surrender.

You would escape to the yard,

soil swollen with worms,

air thick and still,

ticking with the zing of cicadas,

the trill of crickets,

and the evening songs

of whip-poor-will

and robin,

mockingbird and thrush.

Embalmed in Off,

Pall Malls and lighter clutched,

tan arms akimbo,

Revlon-red lips clamped on a smoke,

shrouded in one of dad’s white t-shirts

a pair of jeans, and that red silk scarf,

wrapped around your brown head.

You would crouch alone to weed,

as if in prayer, exhaling secrets

to the pebbles, inhaling promises,

yellowed like old scotch tape.

Your arthritic hands, gnarled,

like the roots of the giant maple,

were relentless in creating

piles of green

up and down the gravel driveway.

Your cat Blanche

shadowed you in a synchronized dance,

zig zagging between your legs

wiry tail held high,

vocalizing her Siamese opinions.

Startled by the house’s quiet,

suddenly aware of your absence,

I would follow the scratch, scratch

of your metal rake

searching for you,

willing you to turn and see me

looking for you.

Dusk made a bed in the sky

and brought the covers

up over the tall pines,

up over the roses,

your figure now a mist,

the lawn a mirage

in the gloaming.

Your upper lip beaded with crystals,

you would swipe your forehead

with the back of your hand and say:

“That’s enough. The mosquitos are starting to bite.”

A few more strokes of your rake,

and you would walk back toward the house

Blanche trotting to catch up.

With a slow close, the kitchen screen door

would allow a few fluttery moths to sneak in.

You would pop open a Pabst Blue Ribbon,

its amber body beading up

under your dirty fingernails,

tilt your head back,

and drink the foamy cold in long gulps.

Night surrounded the house.

Crisp cool sheets and

the tap of the window shade

against the screen.

Car headlights bounced off

the walls of my bedroom,

on their way up the hill

away

away

and all the while,

the crickets, deafening,

rhythmic, like a pulse.