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Our Lady of Mount Carmel

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Mark Jay Brewin, Jr.

*Winner of the 2010
Yellowwood Poetry Prize
Judged by Beth Ann Fennelly*

Our Lady of Mount Carmel
—for Pop Peanuts

Under the soggy shell of my great-grandfather's skin, muscles
sour and nerves unlink like the backyard swing's chain.

He chaperones me on the first floor of his redbrick on odd
Saturdays when my grandmother and mother have their nails

filed and colored. An ill babysitter: his legs are petrified, his hands
are near-useless. His wheelchair tows a bladder of tubes and plastic.

I smack the catheter as if it was a watery punching bag and sing
with the clatter of loose boards below the rolling tire tread.

During these visits, he asks if I want to play parent and has me
wipe out ashtrays, boost him up plywood ramps, and switch channels.

He chatters about his butcher shop or how he kept the porch
flowerbox while I tear open wrappers and feed him candy.

Sleeper sofa unfolded year-round in the den, I wonder out loud
how come he gets to camp out each night by the turn-dial Television.

He recalls a church festival rather than answering me.
Our Lady of Mount Carmel, my great-grandfather is remembering

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blessings and safe passage you once bestowed immigrants
 en route to blueberry orchards, how their small lawn procession

became a city parade and fair. A throng of kneelers at candled shrines.
 A week of cooked sausage grease dripping from sandwich buns,

funhouses and carnival rides sticky from spilled beer. A feast day
 of hangovers and sanctified rosaries for sale. Holy Mother, please

wheel him one last time between the pastry vendors and Sons of Italy
 clambake stand, into St. Joseph's Parish to your painted image.

Let him pray for another chance to weed his tomato garden.
 Let him have his funnel cake supper, a paper plate of long hot peppers.

Virgin Mary, tame his wild bed of morning glories by the pump spigot.
 Carry his brittle husk upstairs to a bed where he hasn't slept in years.