

LOON

He tells the wife when wild loons call  
onscreen from lakes where they don't live.

Measuring each morsel  
the father spends his waking days:

A turkey sandwich. Beans and rice.  
A Fuji apple, red and gold.

He folds the page of the novel:  
Venus misplaced, straight overhead.

He wants all things  
to be more right.

Upstairs, the daughters chirp  
and dip their wings: another day.

And what could he name this *always*,  
this need to count his ups and downs?

Above the marsh-side sycamore,  
in daybreak blue, a fading moon.

In his notebook, the father writes:  
*same body,*  
*different light.*

SHED

*Go get Pauline.* High summer, a black snake  
sunning on flagstone steps next door. Raised

country, she crossed the yard in her floral house dress,  
in her sensible shoes, shovel in hand. She was always old.

She'd met her Russ taking tickets in the booth  
at the *the-a-ter* in Frederick, and he was away

like the other men, some for good, some the day,  
so Pauline, she dealt with snakes. When the business

end of her shovel sliced its head off, the writhing  
rest jerked our bare feet back a step. Not much

blood, still enough to offset the black. Waiting  
in the pew at Saint Anthony's to confess minor sins,

I'd stare at the Mary statue, her pink foot crushing  
a viper. My uncle Tom was home from Vietnam,

a bullet hole in his cheek. He wouldn't tell, so  
God only knows what snakes cruised the Mekong

Delta. Two marriages removed from me and mine,  
he's still a photo shouting what lieutenants shouted

over there. Then the bullet. In the rest home chapel  
where Pauline took communion some four years,

actually old, waiting to join Russ, was there  
a statue? I think I know things now: snakes

eat the white-footed mice that carry ticks,  
so my kids, they let them slide. And confessors

sometimes slither. We'd collect the frail snakeskins  
shed in the basement, or the shed, tack them

to our bedroom walls, always keeping the eyeholes  
clear to assess us, there in the spreading darkness.

CATHOLIC STANDARD

On the blue couch, she crosses her feet,  
adjusts dime store glasses, her nose

like mine. She clears her throat four times,  
chuffing like a morning wren

guarding her twiggy nest.  
I can see my mother alone,

reading her beloved Post at sunrise.  
Her eyebrows rise at the lede.

She scans above the fold, rifles to Sports.  
In Tuesday's Health, two hooks:

*FDA Approves Constant Glucose Monitor  
and Triathlete with Diabetes Wins Race.*

She gets the orange-handled scissors  
from the junk drawer, cuts the first

paragraphs, paper-clips them to the longer  
jumps, puts them with the Catholic Standard piece

on Buzz Leary from grade school  
who's now a parish priest.

I see her return to the warm cushion, tuck  
her feet under. She folds the comics to expose

the crossword, lettering answers  
to problems she can solve.

UNSOLICITED ADVICE

Owsley Stanley, one-time acid-chemist and soundman for the Grateful Dead, the mythical Bear, stares out from the Internet. His website pushes his latest trip—meat-only diets to cure all. My uncle’s friend, Type 1 with zero fat, corners me at a wedding: *You’ve got to run eight miles a day, with weights*. She pulls her insulin pump from a green cocktail dress bra. I mention my sweet blood poems. She lifts her champagne and I see the vein ripping her bicep. *Poems?* she asks. A Navy Tomcat pilot whose pancreas quit kept his wings by eating the exact same meals every day. The air reeks when the herbalist tries moxabustion, burning mugwort over my skin. She sends me home with a dusky cone and instructions, like all the others— drink your own urine, let the aliens take you for those probing tests, drag your ass to Lourdes with the feeble, the desperate, or at least to the fake grotto in DC, hell, at least go back to mass. Confess your sins. From the grave, Dad’s voice again: *no son of mine has diabetes*. His last wife cooked macrobiotic food, told me how the perfect ratio of grains to root vegetables, sprinkled with seaweed, will beat cancer, much less diabetes. The list grows: hot yoga, acupuncture, Ayurveda. Why not Santeria, Ghost Dancing? I find one of Bear’s early Dead shows— Fillmore West in ’69, when his bathroom lab LSD still dropped clean. Now it’s all meat and butter for him, and carbs are poison. The music thrums. He always got the mix right, the highs tight, the lows plush, so balanced, they sound, even on this day, as if they could go on and on forever.

