

## **THE LIVING**

You were reaching for flesh. It  
turned to cloud, then the long rain  
streaming down your body that slightly curves

of skin a home

for loss. Welcome pilgrim. Make of that broad leaf  
a toque, then journey far into the mountains  
where snow vanishes as it reaches

and your yellow cap sails.

Mark Irwin  
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## RIDER

As I carried my mother from the hospital bed  
across the room toward the chair by the window,  
she played with my gold watch as if it were a toy,  
flipping the strap up and down, then singing *Giddyup,*  
*Giddyup,* but as I looked at her she did not smile  
so I nodded my head, snorted, then put a pencil  
in my mouth, as bit, and cantered about the room  
till I was out of breath, puffing, and she patted me, saying,  
*Good boy, Good boy,* so I pawed the carpet, slobbering a little  
like her, as she waved and I nodded my mane  
until this was how we said goodbye one spring  
while the sun shrank to a white hot BB among a thousand  
others receding in the jeweled, black sky as the rivers  
galloped away with her breath through the dark green land.

Mark Irwin

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## EMPIRE

He wore a little spiraled hat and wrote a song  
that everyone sang. He lived on the mountainside  
above a lake with a mythical beast he'd subdued.  
A train circled the village each hour, over and over,  
as he leaned down over the clock of his world  
where people were days becoming months and years.  
In a park, from the hides of ten cows, he'd constructed  
a giant ball that everyone touched until it became  
a torn rag. He had no family, and because he worried  
so much about them: *What if, what if, what if*, like another  
beast pawing away, he'd invented a vitamin for everyone  
old that allowed you to continue slowly to grow  
until you forgot everything you once knew.

Mark Irwin  
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