

Gary Smith

APPEARANCES

Her hot water unit began to leak
three months before she died.
She wore a wig then,
the only outward show and
hard to detect unless you knew her well;
a small concession to chemo's wrath.
Her smile was, when I think of it now,
polite and far too quickly gone.
But otherwise she looked the same;
a little thin perhaps, a bit pale.
After all it's just a word ...

At first, the small brown drops,
undetected unless you sat there for an hour,
extinguished the pilot flame.
Her husband relit the small spark,
only to lose it an hour later
in the hissing of steam.
And because the damned thing
still looked as good as new,
he tried to relight it a dozen times
before its straining innards ruptured
burnt-brown over the green winter lawn.

She was forty seven years old.
The hot water unit was only five and
as I lowered it out of the truck
into a deep plot at the local tip,
I remember its seeming wholeness,
set incongruous against the old dead junk,
gleaming up like a plea.