**Climbing Lessons**

By Aislinn Hunter

Hand over hand I climbed the ladder of my grandfather’s body,

the leg braces under his brown trousers, like steps

to a tree house, the only way up—the arch of my bare foot

finding the metal circle around his ankle, my toes curling over it,

that thin band as familiar as a favoured pair of shoes.

Then my left knee making for his lap, for the top of his leg brace,

leverage to haul myself up by, like our dog’s collar,

how one summer, she pulled me, holding on, up a hill.

There was never any turning back, no getting hoisted by the arms.

In my grandfather’s house you did things of your own volition.

His hand a compass, the way he would tap his chest, say “come here”

as I crawled over mountains to see him, to stretch out

in the hammock of his arms, bury my head between shirt and cardigan.

The thrum of his heart in my ear, intake of breath like wind

at the tent flaps. And I waited there, eyes closed,

made mental lists of the provisions I would need to get home.

The cuff of his sweater a handhold, the pleats of his pants a kind of rope.

It was up there I said my prayers before sleeping, never sure

of where we were as he walked around the house. That darkness

like a country I wanted to enter.

Sometimes the rain came like hands tapping on the roof, and too

the trickling stream of runoff from the gutters, all sounds of the house

close, wrapped around us like a blanket. While outside the porch light

shone like a sun busy in other hemispheres. My grandfather moving

into the place beyond it, long after I’d climbed down.