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## Becoming a Miser

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## *Becoming a Miser*

Suddenly the world stops turning.  
And every crack in the ground collapses  
within itself. Tiny pieces of bark fall  
from the trunks of trees, tumbling  
upon each other at odd angles,  
causing the birds overhead to circle  
again, look out of one eye,  
and fly toward something secure,  
an old nesting place  
or the sturdy branch above  
the river, where the wind  
is always from the east.

It is this way with so much.  
My mother used to speak of an uncle  
who wore only one pair of suspenders,  
the same pair to work and to church,  
who drove his sputtering truck  
on empty, for miles,  
to sell his dead wife's shoes.  
And there was the lady down the block  
who had keys for everything:  
the garage, the cupboards,  
the heavy drawers in her dresser.  
In the end she couldn't escape  
from her own house.  
The smoke had crept up  
from the basement and turned the locks  
inside out  
while she slept.

You, too, have seen it all happen,  
the smallest things turning on themselves,  
leaving you with your arms extended,  
your eyes on the ground, looking  
for a footprint, a single leaf,  
a broken twig.  
And finally you tuck your hands  
in your pockets and move toward  
the open field, searching  
for the pile of rough stones  
someone else has assembled  
and forgotten.

*James Langlas*