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Liminal

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••LIMINAL
PATRICIA MURPHY

I don't need more of anything now. I don't need more to drink, I don't need more to read or to watch, no more to eat, no more to pray for or to wish for or to work for. I stand up from the dinner table and rub my son's head, kiss his blond hair. I smooth my daughter's ponytail, pat her on the shoulder and her eye catches my eye. We have not smiled at each other for years, I am thinking, and I rub my chin, my mouth, remembering the tight, unforgiving jaw lines I have gifted them both. In the kitchen, I run the water hot, hot enough to scrub soil from hands.

After work I like to read the paper, the Post, actually. And after I read each section I like to fold them into quarters and place them in a pile at the side of my chair. I like to read the paper, and I like to watch the news, Channel 5, with the bouncy weatherman who bends at the knees for rain, and at the hips for sun as he gestures at the map. When I pull the paper from its plastic bag, or from its rubber band on days that don't threaten, I peel the sections apart and rearrange them. I put the Front Page face-down on my legs. I cover it with the Local Daily, then I cover that with New Living. Sports and Classifieds go directly to the pile at the side of my chair. I watch the news, and I read the paper, and I don't get up until I can see my lap.

Last week I drove my Triumph TR8 off the side of the road and into a ditch. I can't remember leaving the bar. I can't remember any part of the driving. I didn't wake up until a farmer knocked on the slanted window of the car. I was not injured. And I live nowhere near a farm. "Where are you?" I asked the farmer, who was wearing a hat that said "Lincoln, Nebraska." He drove me to his farmhouse and he called my wife. She came to get me. The car was beyond repair.

I've had a recurring dream since I was a child. My mother could tell you this. I'm standing on top of a tree stump that is 15 feet high. At first it is sturdy, and I am pleased because I can see around for miles. I can see the house where I was born, and the store where my mother bought groceries. I can see the road that leads to my cousin Peggy's house, and I can see the road that my father took to work every day. I am standing on top of the tree stump, and I want to see everything I can see. I am straining to look beyond what I see every day. I want to see even those things that are too small to see. But my desire turns fluid. My desire has caused the stump to start swaying. Instead of creating vision, I have created motion. The stump sways left and so I lean right. The stump sways right and so I lean left. And soon I can't control it. And the stump falls down, and I land on top of my house, and my mother is dead.