

Fall 1976

Autumn Cleaning

Philip Pierson

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AUTUMN CLEANING

An ordinary wiskbroom it was, one of those jobs
wound with copper wire. Perhaps bearing
a tiny wooden disk on the handle, Old Man's

Cave, or Coover Dam. Your mother tells the story
of your hiding it under the floormats
of the Oldsmobile Super 88 where it would

not be found for weeks. This is the same Oldsmobile
in which, years on, you will coax
Marilyn Ryan to the shredding back seat

where stuffing spills onto the floor like dirty
urine-stained snow, & someone has left
a jackhandle, two empty cans of oil. Marilyn

Ryan wipes steam from the window with
a Kleenex, rubs her nose. God but you wish
the car-radio worked. Your mother wants to know,

standing over you huge as a tree going yellow,
why you've suddenly become practical.
Behind her the Motorola brays so loudly

her skirt & apron seem to flare out with wind.
You watch her mouth clap open & closed.
This is Autumn, time to take the wiskbroom

to the inner recesses of the cupboards where
dried crumbs & coffee grinds sift over the dark
shelves like leaves in an empty lot at night

seen from stories up. Your mother will
be on her knees. She will appear jammed to her hips
in the cupboard. Stacks of boxes, jars beside her.

You, smiling to yourself on the linoleum
floor, you will be scooting on your palms as if
at only five years old attempting

some prodigious dance to the commotion of
the radio, as if you knew all along the wiskbroom
was hidden safe from all harm, the music

too loud, the autumn arbitrary, bright, cold.