

POETRY | FALL 2019

## Caregiving

By Brian Ascalon Roley

We try to keep it secret from him  
the source of our ailments  
it is a sad joy  
to watch our son grow into a man  
cuteness lost to handsome  
features, growing into his own  
as we prematurely decay  
from all the lifting  
of this adult

body. The bending over to stretch his spastic legs  
so his muscles will not grow slower  
than his bones; to wedge his feet into the wheelchair  
footplate and bind them down by ripstop  
straps; to make sleep possible by alleviating  
his pain.

It is one thing to lift a baby or toddler  
into your arms  
and throw him at the sky laughing  
but a man in your arms  
tips you back on your heels  
compresses your joints, inflames  
your tendons and nerves.

And now, in mid middle age  
we sometimes hunch over  
and get mistaken for elderly  
our crooked necks, backs  
arms that burn  
so hot  
I can barely type

she says every word counts more in poetry  
I say, every word burns

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**Brian Ascalon Roley has received fellowships and awards from the University of Cambridge, Cornell University, the Ohio Arts Council, Djerassi, Ragdale, and the VCCA. He is currently Professor of English at Miami University of Ohio.**

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