

Drive

By Joanne Clarkson

He asked one thing of you, an art student, his parttime caregiver: He wanted to drive one final time. Now ninety-nine, it had been years since he turned a key in any ignition. The road beyond was gravel. No traffic mid-day, mid-week. He needed so little, mostly slept while you sketched the landscape beyond his window. You half-prayed the old Chrysler wouldn't start, but it did. He was so bent now, so thinned of bone and muscle, he could barely see over the dashboard. You buckled yourself in. He pressed his slippered foot down and the car lurched forward. He nosed it onto the roadway, gravel growling, thunderous. He gave a little yip. You clenched your fists in your lap. Faster and faster the sedan rolled. Louder and louder his breathing, your breathwork. Fences shot by. Starlings scattered. You glanced, terrified, at the gauge. He was doing 15 miles per hour, or was it per minute? He stopped as suddenly as he began, chest slumped over the wheel, shoulders shaking with the exhaustion of joy. You changed places and drove the 500 feet back home. His gratitude was obvious in the ease of his afternoon nap, how he ate a second portion at supper. Even as you pondered what risk can mean to art.

Joanne Clarkson is a poet whose sixth poetry collection, "Hospice House," was released by MoonPath Press in 2023. Her poems have been published in such journals as Poetry Northwest, The Healing Muse, Examined Life Journal, American Journal of Nursing and Beloit Poetry Journal. She has received an Artist Trust Grant and an NEH grant to teach poetry in rural libraries. Clarkson has Masters Degrees in English and Library Science, has taught and worked for many years as a professional librarian. After caring for her mother through a long illness, she re-careered as a Registered Nurse working in Home Health and Hospice.

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