

Beginning of February, ice-melt
 across the tar of the landing
making its bleak little landscape
 beyond the window, mountain
passes of snow, asphalt-dark
 inlets. Already the week-old
storm has shifted through several
 geological eras, upheaval then
erosion along the curbs, until
 now the shoveled drifts show all
that remains in the successions
 of time and exposure. If we could
see our histories in x-ray, the sweet
 dissembling now turned half-clear
in the mildly harmful radiation
 of our gnosis, they might resemble
the flawed geometries forming these
 scaled-down sierras and exhaust-
washed arroyos. I think we'd be
 metaphor rather than memory,
some sheer promise of a knowing
 that would shatter and stay like
nighttime waters. On our drive to visit
 my wife's mother in her nursing
home, there's a stretch of parkway
 where vines and trees tangle for
every inch of light and air.

 The landscape they make looks as manic
as a preschooler's crayon coloring,
 no space untouched. Her mother's
almost all space now, the voids
 becoming ever more solid, and
I don't know where the details
 go as synapses misfire, the network
unknots. Language no longer an
 element to live by, involuntary
as breath, but the wild bird
 amazed inside the house, stunned
for sky. In the Yuan Dynasty the great
 master Huang Gongwang roughed out
the unfinished handscroll of his mountain



dwelling in one sitting, the whole
composition, then carried it with him
the rest of his days, long horizon
rolled in its silk sleeve. In the evening,
as if drawing down a shade, he would
spread it out to add the dragon
veins to each crevice, pour shadows
through the pines. Tea cooling in
his cup, the lamp flame low. Finding
more room everywhere he looked, wind
on the roof like a barely wet brush.