

Denise M. Rogers

A Loss (a poem in the voice of my mother)

--in memory of Edward Recar

There was a time,
before I lost my French,

I knew enough
to sing with tunes
my grandpa crooned.

When I was small,
he spoiled with his sweets

and he toted me
upon his back
around the gallery.

We'd end up
at the pantry shelves

where I would root
to my small heart's content.

(I liked the pictures of the kids
on cookie tins and apple cans.)

One day you'll have your own;
and I'd shake my head.
His eyes would crinkle
as we put them back again.

That year I got the influenza bad.
He wrapped me up and drove us
round and down the lanes.

So now it seems all wrong
he doesn't have a stone,

no iron cross
to mark the place he lays.

One year, my daddy paced it off

a dogwood tree,
but now that tree is gone,
and all I know is
he's in Richwoods' churchyard there.

He died in summer.
I remember that.

My uncles made the box
they put him in.

They laid them out at home
back in those times.

I wasn't scared.
I don't think I understood,

not until my mother covered
our few mirrors one by one.

We wouldn't want his soul
caught up at home, she said.

When she found me in the parlor
pulling all the pillowcases off,
she spanked me hard.

I sat out on the porch
and cried all day, knowing
he never would have minded
that I'd wanted him to stay.