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Does This Happen to Everyone?

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Does This Happen to Everyone?

Robert De Smith

Does this happen to everyone?
You're driving along,
Left hand at 12 o'clock—

I learned 10 and 2
But practice 12 and zero,
Impervious to the new
Regimen:
no higher than 9 and 3,
Thumbs outside the wheel,
Safe from the airbag's
Punch to your face.

I'm impervious, I say,
Habit, that faithful mutt,
Winning over information every time.

But does this happen to everyone?
You're driving along,
Impervious, as I have said,
When you are suddenly
Looking not at the back of your hand
But at his—your father's.

Where'd all that weathering come from?

They are not really his, of course.
Those I saw last
Too serene,
Plastic, bejeweled,
Crossed in the composure of death.

It made me tap the brakes.

So, not the same, but his still—
Aged, veined, big-knuckled—
And at the right spot on the wheel.

“You looked just like your Dad,”
She says, after I wade back in
From a thigh-deep walk into
Chilly Lake Michigan with my son.

Your hands rise at your side, and
You get on tiptoes to reach the sandbar.

Distance causes distortion, I think.

Or maybe it's the cap.

No; Yes. It's me but it's also him.

Why else am I at that lake
With my own family?
Or driving one-handed,
Alert to the feel of the wheel,
The hum of all whirring parts?

I remember a ride from town to the lake,
Squeezing into a sidecar with my brother,
My Mom and Dad astride the bike.

We tucked low to hide from the wind;
We looked up at his hand on the throttle:
"Faster!"