ROLLER COASTER

Jay Ruzesky

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My father laughed and it was

the first and only time so far

I've heard him do it; a real

laugh deep from inside

climbing like an artillery shell

up his throat and pushing out of

his Edvard Munch mouth.

We were commuters aimed at heaven,

riding a steep, open train toward

the sun-god at the end

of the line, padded straps

reefing our shoulders against

plastic seats. This was

the last place I wanted to be,

locked in like an astronaut,

someone else driving,

lunch rising in my chest.

My eyes were open to

the whine of pulleys as we

ascended a slope snow wouldn't

hold to if snow fell through the

ridiculous summer air. There was

a moment as we reached

the first peak and crested

when I smiled too at weightlessness,

the feeling as you float

from a swell in a fast highway until

most of me dropped. I felt

my stomach's desire

to stay behind up there where it could see

halfway to Saskatchewan and

to bail out again at

the bottom as we were

caught like eggs by a

giant hand and sent up again

over a short rise only to

plunge face-first at the ground

continuing as we rolled

through a giant loop, swooped

with the energy of descent and

twisted through a series

of corkscrew turns, our

brains in startled mobius,

my father wide with giddy terror.

Somewhere along the way he

reached over and squeezed my hand

and our astounded spirits

or some other part of us

that it seemed we could do without

for a while raced behind

like afterimages as we rolled on

through the inverted morning,

clutching each other,

wearing death-masks of happiness.