

There and back

Somewhere between
chitchat and heart to heart,
my parents and I talk
in the living room
while toads trill
in the dark pond
outside.

We rub each other's feet
as tomcat on porch
bats at moth come to gaze
in rippled glass
of farmhouse
window.

The chemo is tomorrow,
we'll rise before dawn,
leaving shelter of hills
for the big city on glacial plain
smooth like the thin white paper
that covers the exam table
like an unblemished shroud,
always a fresh length
awaiting each patient.

Outside the cancer center
there is an artificial creek
with real ducks and ducklings,
a real hawk perched nearby,
waiting for the right moment.

Inside, masked patients wait like ghosts
for port draws and blood test results,
then line up to lie down in poison beds,
putting faith in their bodies and science.

Today the news is good,
blood counts better,
cancer smaller,
so we count our blessings
and head for the hills.

"There and back, all in one day,"
my parents used to announce
upon arriving home from an outing
when I was young.

I repeat those words now to my father,
then switch off the ignition.
We sit a moment in silence
before going in the house.