

Cousin

MYRNA GARANIS

yeah, I'd say he was surprised to see me,
out of my loop, so to speak, so was he,
my cousin Mel in a small-town hospital,
playing patient, not doing a good job either,
his big-boat Buick poised in the lot
for getaway

I've driven two extra hours south,
secondary highway, when it should have been
due west, double-lane, paved all the way
home, never bothered before
to look up a cousin, near or distant

his brother sounded serious
on the phone, no ex-wives jokes
at Mel's expense, said it's his heart,
big one for sure, damaged over the years,
not rodeo scars like the rest,
bar-brawl souvenirs

maybe once, Mel checked on me,
on his way to a trucking job up north,
we never made it to each other's weddings,
lately we've managed a few of the same
family funerals

Mel's awol when I reach his ward,
nurse guesses he's down at the Petro-Can
slurping forbidden coffee, or maybe
the curling rink, junior girls' bonspiel on

I track him to the car wash,
he looks alive to me, enough to resume
my homeward trek after an hour
flapping family gums, trading memory cards,
mortality pressed in close
to our offhand conversation