

In the Picture

The latest insurance salesman
unpacks his black briefcase
at our dining room table.
On the thin tape that spins
like fate from his hand computer,
he puts my recent figures.
A string of lapsed policies
trails out behind me,
but I am still young, the computer says,
my life's a good buy.

He hits the dire buttons
of my disabling: my family steers
my wheelchair resentfully
through our mortgaged house,
for I'm a poor planner.
Another run of numbers and I'm
"out of the picture" once again,
that old grinning euphemism
which covers my eyes with a black bar
in the photo of my son and me
playing basketball in our driveway—
just like that, I'm out.

And where will he be then?
Not my son, I mean. I mean
this agent, this tall man
with oiled hair who thumbs me out
like a referec, who calls me
to a death that never calls him.
Will he still be there, in some
picture like this: a low light,
a round table, a young client
who wants to believe in insurance,
who presses his palms into a tense steeple
and listens to his children breathing
in the deep indemnity of their quiet rooms?

—*Claude Liman*