

DAVID FEDO

## Idiopathy

"There's a reason for everything,"  
 my father used to say,  
 but I've always been a skeptic.

For example,  
 right now,  
 about the persistent pain  
 located just over my spleen,  
 high on the left ribcage,  
 which flares up when I move suddenly  
 and sometimes even when I breathe—  
 the doctors and their MRI machines  
 can offer no diagnosis.  
 Is it internal,  
 muscular,  
 serious or not?  
 Has it been visited upon me  
 because of some past sin,  
 or has it just randomly found me?  
 Will I die?

I agree that it is foolish to contest  
 the universal laws  
 of cause and effect—  
 as, for example, whether the build-up of pressure  
 in a volatile atmosphere  
 leads to lightning,  
 or whether the engine in my wife's new Camry  
 actually seized on the Central Artery  
 because of leaking oil,  
 or whether death often follows chronic famine.

These things—  
leaves dropping from trees in late October,  
the Red Sox folding regularly even before that,  
the collapse of governments in Africa,  
the decline of the novel,  
why icicles form on gutters—  
are easily understood by sensible people,  
even children.

But now,  
just turned 60,  
I am less certain than ever  
that there are clear answers  
to the critical whys and hows of our lives,  
much less the tangled metaphysical questions  
wrestled with by poets and thinkers.  
Tracing effects back to causes,  
discovering the origins and derivations  
of births, divorces, treacheries and deaths  
is a tricky and often unprofitable business.  
The paper boy  
sometimes doesn't deliver the paper,  
and he or his boss may not phone to say why,  
and we are in the dark  
about all the news of the world.