

INGRID MILLER

INSIDE SAM'S GARAGE

When he asked
how I would hold a lathing hatchet
I didn't know how indifferent I could be.

It was soon after his best friend Louis died,
a sharply blue sky and white cloud-running autumn afternoon,
everything brilliant.

I stood on the cold cement floor
watching my old friend
separate each tool slowly from the others.
I wondered why he thought I should know
these mechanical names,
the special purpose of each.

I stood quietly watching him,
encircled not with coffee-filled mugs,
church women's prayers, but
with aluminum paint-splattered ladders,
grass rakes, roughened sweat-stained hoes,
Rhode Island red gasoline containers as
the outside winds shoved in
dust, crimson maple leaves,
and dead chrysanthemum petals
stilled by the chance of winter.

When Sam asked
how I would hold an ancient ratchet
and pushed it into my hands,
my mouth clamped shut
as I stifled a yawn.

Then, his rough fingers' chill
shook me awake. I looked into his reddened eyes
and listened.

I listened to every word,
this quiet language of a man's grief,
as he taught me
all he knew.