

Frayed Along the Edges

“If there’s anyone I need to talk to,
it’s you,” laments Carl’s email.
“Mary Ann, stage four liver cancer,
now pneumonia, home hospice.”

Carl and I met fifty years ago.
Two farm boys in harmony
with cows grazing pastures,
corn shucks flying the wind,
winding creeks, whirling windmills,
hip-roofed red barns, tool sheds,
mother hens parading their chicks,
the bite of winter’s pellet snow,
sweat and dust of summer,
and the flicker of kerosene lamps.

“Could I come tomorrow?”

Sweaty palms as the doorbell chimes,
what to say as the door squeaks.
We embrace, man to man.
We weep, man to woman.
I hold his hand, kiss her forehead,
see her shuttered eyes and tilted head,
hear her soft breath whisper:
“I’m tired. I’m ready to go.
I think I see the light.”

Two weeks later, almost midnight,
my cell phone vibrates, lights up:
“Carl.”

by Arlin Buyert