

AN EXACT REPLICA

Oddly enough, I was the one
In the hospital—this same
Hospital, Mother Seton—three months ago, when my new
Neighbor
Moved in. A shopping cart
Had come careening
Down a hilly side street, entering the intersection
A second or two
Before
I did. No grocery store in the vicinity, but *there*
It was: I swerved to avoid it, swerved
Again to miss
The kid
On the bike, the one who always shows up on cue
In these situations, and then a convenient
Street lamp
Stepped forward to prevent
Any further swerving. The heavy concrete
Pillar absorbed
My car's momentum, and the seat belt
Absorbed mine.
Which interior object
Gave my knee
A sound rap has yet to be determined. I "walked away
From the accident," as they say,
But as I stood
Talking to the police, demanding that the runaway cart
Be ticketed
For attempting to leave the scene—
Post-traumatic
Humor which left the cops
Strangely unamused—my right leg collapsed
And I crumpled
To the pavement. The patella
Is a small bone, but as I learned in that moment, a leg
Is largely
Useless without one: no kneecap,
No walking.

The surgeon beamed
With professional
Pride after the operation: seven
Fragments, his personal best, reunited
With screws
And bailing wire, all titanium of course. He was happy to put
A cheerful spin
On my long night, after surgery, of anesthetic-induced
Terror: he gave me
A Demerol drip, with a plunger
I could use
To dose myself
Every ten minutes.

And so it wasn't until four
Days later, four narcotic days
After the shopping cart
Interrupted
My daily commute home, that I first
Met William. I was paying the cab driver
When a stranger approached, introduced
Himself, helped extract
A recalcitrant
Crutch from the back seat, and told me
How excited he was
To be my new neighbor.

"Not so much
For the proximity
To you," he said, helping me toward
The curb, "though I expect
"We'll be great friends. No, what excites
Me, thrills me, engages my
Speculative
Faculties is this fortuitous
Structure." He gestured toward the peeling
Paint of my front porch while I, suddenly uncertain
Of my crutching abilities, regarded
The steps
With unease. "For you see," he said, "notwithstanding
The depredations
Of time, this house—I was elated when I saw

The For Rent sign—it's an exact
Replica
Of the house where I spent
My innocent
Happy childhood!"