The Child Who Walks Backwards By Lorna Crozier

My next-door neighbour tells me

her child runs into things.

Cupboard comers and doorknobs

have pounded their shapes

         into his face. She says

he is bothered by dreams,

rises in sleep from his bed

to steal through the halls

and plummet like a wounded bird

       down the flight of stairs.

This child who climbed my maple

with the sureness of a cat,

trips in his room, cracks

his skull on the bedpost,

    smacks his cheeks on the floor.

When I ask about the burns

on the back of his knee,

his mother tells me

he walks backwards

     into fireplace grates

or sits and stares at flames

while sparks burn stars in his skin.

Other children write their names

on the casts that hold

      his small bones.

His mother tells me

he runs into things,

walks backwards,

breaks his leg

      while she lies

sleeping.