Raising the Dead

by Samuel Smith in the July 2023 issue

is never easy, not even in a dream. You start with an old woman, long, grey tufts of hair shooting out of nose and ears, skin drawn taut against bone.

When you open her eyes, you will know she is your grandmother, and that indistinct man next to her must be your grandfather.

But when you open his mouth, bucked white teeth have supplanted the tobacco-browned diminutives that once sifted irrepressible laughter.

Soon you've softened and billowed skin, trimmed nose and ears, fired eyes with embers from the potbelly stove, and restored ancient atoms, molecules, and cells.

When the time for speech has come, you find you cannot breathe the word—the words you wish to hear are not your own.

To speak of sun and sand, of black bears milling just beyond screened doors and windows, of hornet's nests in greying outhouses torched with old railroad flares, of back-breaking oar-pulling against cold Ontario wind and rain—

This is to be simply grateful for the life that was and is, with no need for any life to come.