

Jeffrey C. Alfier

The Wintering

Raising golden retrievers for so long
you'd think he'd weary of their sad endings.
The empty bunk beds of fellow airmen
left in night skies of Hamburg or Berlin
never panged him like the loss of a dog.
Each one of them died early of cancer.
The first sign appears when they quit eating,
pausing at their bowls, then looking away
as if the food there was no food at all.

'Well . . . time marches on,' he refrains once more.
Outside, winter winds rattle the windows.
Finding his hat, he locks the coal shed door.
Sitting with my mother, they talk breeders:
maybe a new bloodline won't be so cursed.
With day waning to blessed tiredness
he forgets to rearrange routine things,
but finds his cigars; later, after dusk,
whistles softly from a balcony chair.

JEFFREY C. ALFIER is a U.S. Air Force officer serving in Europe. His work has previously appeared in **WLA**.