

C O R E Y T H R A S H E R

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## What Strength

—In memory of my father Paul Thrasher (1929-2012), TSgt USAF

My father's foot atop a shovel blade  
Could force frozen ground apart  
In one step. Turf twisted round and  
Splintered with ice lay stacked like  
Cannonballs after minutes of work.

In wet seasons commanding even  
Water he tiered creek-bed with  
Pipe, rock, and clay: a ladder  
Salmon would climb—into bed  
With each other. (He made salmon

Easy catches, easy to catch.)  
Extending his forearm slippery  
With sweat after a day of tearing  
Bramble from disused corridors  
Of golf course, I pulled my five year-old

Body up and up. He never bent under  
My weight. We used to call his thumb  
And index finger “the wrench,” which  
Doubled as his name: “Get ‘The Wrench’  
In here,” and he screwed U-pipes

Under sinks so tight my fine hands  
Could not budge the seal. What strength  
Korean ministers said he had  
Marking the grip as they thanked him  
For his service during the war.

Blood bruised on a drip of morphine  
After he no longer pares his nails  
Or eats—in his last hour—that familiar  
Grip holds my hand and I return it the way  
He taught: enough to know I’m here.



**COREY THRASHER** holds an MFA from Columbia University. His poems appear in *The Paris Review*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *Western Humanities Review*, other journals, and are forthcoming in *The Antioch Review* and elsewhere.