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Milk Snake

Wally Swist

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Milk Snake

Your colors blend
 with dirt and flecked leaf litter,
 your patterned loops marked

beside the warm
 brick of the porch steps
 where we found you at noon

in full sun;
 the tact of
 your name, taken from legend—

where you sucked
 the udders of pastured cows;
 and your nickname *farmer's friend*,

ridding barn and field
 of insects to benefit a stout
 crop. Today when I watch, you

bask in your warm spot,
 your full arm's length
 only three-quarters in view, tail

still under
 the last layer of
 siding. I step a touch too near;

you reel in flesh
and scales, a jack-in-a-box
who rids our home of rodents,

met in the vise-
grips of jaws
and your body's sinewy muscles.

Tonight when I flick
on the porch light,
you will slide away in a fluid s

from beneath
my shadow, sweeping your
length over a crackle of leaves.

Wally Swist

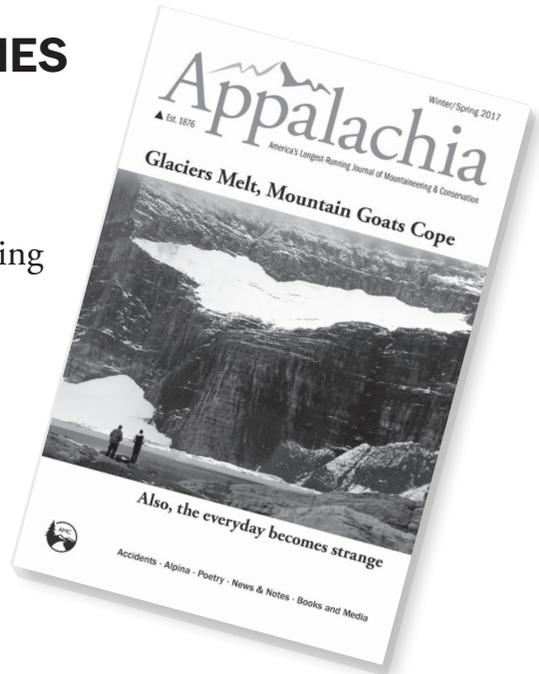
WALLY SWIST's books include *Huang Po and the Dimensions of Love* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2012); *The Daodejing: A New Interpretation*, with David Breeden and Steven Schroeder (Lamar University Literary Press, 2015); and *Invocation* (Lamar University Literary Press, 2015). His poems have appeared in many publications, including *Commonweal*, *North American Review*, *Rattle*, *Sunken Garden Poetry, 1992–2011* (Wesleyan University Press, 2012), and *upstreet*. Garrison Keillor recently read a poem of Swist's on the public radio program *The Writer's Almanac*.

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