

*My Father Fell for FDR*

quoted him over and over on the flight to Miami  
when I was twelve and shaking  
as the plane flew into lightning.

*There's nothing to fear but fear itself—*

That was before Rudi Joseph returned from vacation taller  
than the teachers, his boy's body hijacked,  
sudden mustache a ragged crow that clung  
to his upper lip. I stared at him in the cafeteria,  
followed him through hallways and the library  
where he swooped down and slapped my face  
while the librarian sharpened the miniature pencils.

That was years before my father's Parkinson's,  
fall after fall after stumble-and-fall, his body  
covered with bruises the colors of autumn leaves.

Before his neighbor at the Golden Oaks  
twirled his wheelchair through the lobby in manic circles,  
extended his palsied hand and cried "Shake and Bake!"  
as he convulsed with laughter.

Before my father faked a laugh that lingered  
too long, then evaporated, a skywriter's last words  
on a blank slate of sky.

Jennifer Markell's first book of poetry, *Samsara*, is forthcoming from Word Tech Communications in April 2014. Her poems have been displayed at Boston City Hall and published in journals nationally and internationally, including *The Aurorean*, *The Hawaii Pacific Review*, *The Human Journal*, and *Rhino*.