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Ersatz Umbrella

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JEFF HANDY

Ersatz Umbrella

The newspaper had by now
clotted into cold mashed potatoes
in the upturned bowl of
his hands.

It fell in curds, the words
of April 1940,
like glacier melt,
some into the empty inkpots
of his ears,
this man in step
with the marching of rain,
some into the unplugged
clichés of his mouth
and pasting the typebars
of his teeth

together,
others still falling
in Niagara barrels
over the verge of his fedora,
for which the newspaper
was by now
its own cloud
far below a sky
the shade of
decades old denim,
and all muddy rivers

of print down
justified columns,
all of them guilty of some
miscalculation of spirit,
all of them writing off
margins and convention,
all of them untabbing grafts
and finishing with ledes,
all of them going things
and saying places,
all of their and the man's
truth and sense
turning inside-out in the rain,
like a weak umbrella.