

Across and Down

for J.C.M., 1946-1949

He smoked a pipe and read the *Mercury*
but saved the crossword page for her. At dawn
she wrestled with small, numbered squares. Her poetry—

her home, five sons and daughters, a family
she made with George. She could depend upon
him, smoking pipes and reading. *Mercury*

winked out beside the moon each day as she
put water on to boil and wept for her son John.
She wrestled with small, numbered squares half-heartedly

in half-dark bungalow until, hungry,
four children woke. One flipped the light switch on.
George smoked a pipe and read. Both *Mercury*

and scarlet fever—gods of thieves and trickery—
had flown through every house, and paused, then gone.
She wrestled with small, numbered squares. No poetry

they read in church, no hymns they sang off-key
could bring full light. They kept the curtains drawn.
He smoked a pipe and read the *Mercury*,
she wrestled with small, empty squares—her poetry.