

401K  
by Tony Gabriele

The numbers are not real, I tell myself.  
They are marks, ciphers, abstractions,  
The printer's thumbprints of toner on paper.

No, they are even less, I say aloud,  
Blips on a screen on a banker's desk,  
Vanishing as his forefinger taps a mouse.

It's not Scrooge McDuck's money bin  
Full of cold hard cash, where you can burrow  
In the coins, tickle yourself with greenbacks.

No, just ink pretending to be computer blips,  
Elusive electrons, which Wall Street physicists  
Thought had energy, but seem to lack mass.

Again I tell myself it is not, it is not  
A thing, a fact, a reality,  
A hole in the blanket wrapped around my future.

It is not the trip to Venice someday,  
It is not the retirement community lease,  
Not even the prescription drug co-pay.

If you'd slipped a bold hand in my pants  
And lifted my wallet with a few Andy Jacksons,  
Grabbed a Grant, boosted a Benjamin,

I would be hurt, maimed, mutilated,  
Disfigured by the loss of real money,  
The amputation of my hip pocket.

But this is not real, these phantoms  
Of 5's becoming 4's, 3's shrunk to 2's;  
You can't subtract from nothing, right?

Or so I tell myself, as I put down  
The year-end statement, and search the fridge  
Hoping the leftovers will eke out tonight's dinner.