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April 10, 2023

The Lift

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An abstract of
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Abstract

The Lift

By Henry Koskoff

The Lift is an autobiographical, retrospective collection of poems inhabiting the margin between logic and magic. These poems seek to explore how children figure the chaos into which they are born, and track resonant points of disillusionment along the maturation process. Though fairly chronological, the trajectory of this bildungsroman complicates a completely linear passage of time, dwelling in moments of bewilderment, intrigue and loss. From it emerges a durational life narrative from an embodied perspective.

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I feel that I have had a blow; but it is not, as I thought as a child, simply a blow from an enemy hidden behind the cotton wool of daily life; it is or will become a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words.

— Virginia Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past”

THE LIFT

I was seven in a muddy lawn
freshly shot by the sky.
Bugs waded in the carnage.
My brothers & I, my two brothers & I,

we slid through as the rain up-
cycled leaving sheets of clay
for landscapers to deal with.
We were painted. The pigment

was hot. I remember knowing
the innate fixture of things,
how this shallow bog would soon lift
& become a fantastic dirty cloud.

Science was readymade
as the snacks that brought us inside.
My brothers ran. I waited
in the carnage. My parents took note

it was odd. Recently
they've been relaying stories
where I'm painted as a cosmic invader
flung headfirst into Real Life.

But no, I was actually a bug
in that warm plot. I wanted to be
lifted— thought if I covered myself
in enough of earth's juice

I could rise & fall back
into place. Thought it would be nice
to see our house from above.
No one ever told me otherwise,

so I stayed there for about five minutes
with my eyes closed.

I.

Heirloom

UNISON

I just woke up from a dream about shoplifting.
I can't remember what I stole, only
how it ends: in aleatory noise. In spectral light—

the blaring, a burst. My great-grandfather
puts his hands through. (He figures.)
Having never met me, he etches a too-
sinewy cheek. He works in matte glass panels,
remembering everything flipped.

I remember running from the corner store door
in line with faceless men. When I got to
the bright side of the street, a cop was waiting for me.

Nonnie renders the boy of me in oils, *chiaroscuro*,
often losing the brush's grip. & like that
Mom lets my hair grow across a grid of flaking gold-
leaf she placed & pre-varnished. I enter the shine
with a governmental stride.

The men were decoys. The cop was a step ahead.
I rose to plug blaring from the nightstand,
& I only stole a stick of gum.

RETROSPECTIVE IN A PANTRY

I was born
into prosper—
a pantry
with shelves just like this,
all sterling & plasticine.

I reared ready
with inventory—
glossy, chilled, safe
from a bird-
blistering outdoor heat.

The crashing car
crashed. My snacks were wrapped
& redeemed between machine-
ry. I nibbled & spooned,
emptying jars.

Soon I was surrounded
by the sheen of these
discards. The fort-
ress crinkled. Waiters waited
at the door, way-

too tacky
granola bits in hand.
Camouflaged by chamomile,
this is all
I remember:

The password is exquisite.
I am quiet as silk.
Cereal, jet fuel—
it irrigates through. Is mine.
Everything's warfare.

THE GLASS

I.

The glass in the pediatrician's lobby
was thick, globular & segmented
by right angles. Through it
elevators swirled, which made
sense perfectly.

Then there was the glass
cylinder that kept the fish in
their fishy realm of plastic cap-
sized shipwrecks, my eyes seized
by the sickening cobalt.

What made no sense at all
was this: there could be something
between me & the fish
& we'd look just the same
to each other. It's called a window.

Walking together, my father & I
once remarked on the weather.
It was our favorite temperature:
body. When the outdoors
matches your blood:

a window. Your skin's the glass.
On such days I always
want to let Dad know how I feel:
crushable. Like part of Mom's menagerie.
Her painted rooster, its clinky crest.

Because of her I was exactly
on time for ballet, which everyone knows
is late. *A la seconde* we were told
to make our arms resistant as acrylic,
to make sure in the mirror.

Mirrors are made of glass
with a motive. I arrived half-

empty with the head of a rooster
& horrible human knobs
where I bent.

I danced my feathers akimbo
for years before an imagined audience
but could never imagine
the glass wasn't glass—
it was actually mylar pulled taut,

& when it wounded I found
behind it only plush darkness,
a pitch-black abyss,
something to hold a whole
ancestry of faces.

II.

It scares me to sit
in this audience.
A man named Noah
performs a series of tricks
interposed with narrative

from the History of Magic.
A glass orb emerges
from his cuff to replace
the bubble he's blown.
Just warming up.

It's a Jewish crowd—
we understand & appreciate
the heft of his new sphere,
operational mechanics,
sleight of mouth.

In younger years
I might've cried
over the illusion.
Now I only fear
being called upon.

BABA'S BIOGRAPHY

after Michael Dumanis

Born between brimstone barriers.
Brighton. Bright, before breakfast.

Body burst, brain bamboozled—
blinded beneath big bulbs.

Buffed because bottled. Blankets burgeoned.
Boarding boat bolting bayonet barrage,

body bubbled benign barnacles.
Bubbe bribed bouncer.

Beyond boisterous bay, bridge
bequeathed blessing. Bible: be *balaboosta*.

Baba believed. Bought blinis
by bank-borrowing. Brooded. Bent bills.

Besides bartending, bested bitter boys:
Brown bachelors, Benjamin's "bricoleurs."

Benefactor bit. Became beau. Brought
bordeaux, bouquets, beaches, baklava, booze.

Buried bland blandishments,
beau's biological business (branch).

Began building: Bathroom. Bedroom. Balcony.
Bereft backdoor breeze. Broke boredom

by birthing. Bleeding, begot brief
blues but brewed benefits—

bye bye barracks! Begone battalion!
Bountiful being; burdensome blow.

SHEDDING SEASON

Because 7 ate 9

On the eve of my seventh birthday
I lay awake waiting to go bald.
That joke about the fear of Six
made me think of Seven as lionlike.

In the morning our living
room was lined in fur. I observed
the depths of objects in my eyeline
like a newborn with no hair to lose.

Amongst it all was my doll (a green gogo girl
I called Celery), as well as actual celery.
I ran to rescue the former
then watched the latter get ravaged

by our dog who looked nothing
like a lion but still fulfilled the role
by patrolling each room's
perimeter, hungry.

TIDAL

I.

Each beach begins with parameter,
configurations of kitsch
distracting along a coast-

line which is always encroaching.
Stakes are pulled accordingly, slide clean
out of sand & who's the wiser?

No one, we're all so small in the sea.
In class we tried our hands at cartography,
running oily trails over swaths of smooth

blue. We called them *bodies*
but coming to shore we could only say
The Ocean. It was an heirloom,

a giant pendant inherited by land,
full of dark whipping. The inner walls
of my grandmother's house mounted

tidals I titled: Seascape in Grays,
Bay with Fury Overhead,
Gleaming Strip of Sand Below Black-

Eyed Weather. None were used.
Nonnie's never had my appetite
for nomenclature, only love

for the rumbling blue belly
she tempts but doesn't temper,
she asks about the new arrangements:

*this frame works well with the reds here,
or I could swap these, or you know what,
here's a hurricane I never knew what*

to do with. Incredible
how she tracks her syntax. Mom's resort-

ed to interruption, making a dam

of her own words to lodge in the limitless
stream. She's in this dream I've been having
called Tsunami Mommy.

II.

The dream begins with
an edge. A beach. The Ocean.
Mommy & me, our busts floating

to the same degree, level with blue masses
on the horizon. Some submarine
force keeps shifting us aside

from our chairs. We head in hand-in-
hand, displacement now vertical.
Faraway plates unhinge,

subduct, override, pucker.
All I can see from here is pullback.
Impossible creatures tumble toward

a strip of white crest—
A Seismic Revving. It sounds like Jupiter
underneath. The families quiet,

disquiet, gather their belongings.
I look back to find only sediment—
The Fatal Bluff. My nose runs

over open lips. *Mommy, mommy.*
She turns her concern down at me,
& it is that which drains limp

from her eyes, through her hair,
as the water hits her head & her head
hits the rock, giving out to

new waters.

SHOE SHOP

Six shoes— one pair per brother.
The brands are all blurred
but I know only mine were
still velcro. & I know
my father's face. His one vaulted knee
as he vended in character: *hello sir,*
what can I do for you today?

I perched atop a shallow wooden curb,
on one side of the suture
that marked what was old & new
about our house. My lines came from under
the idea of a mustache— a gentle boy
blown up against gentleman-
ly contours. Etiquette was everything.

Post-negotiation I paid
with invisibills (ancient currency).
My father fashioned firmly, his fingers
cuffing my ankles' complete circum-
ference as the shoes shifted
into place. So for me
the performance was crucial,

but for him it was only
a bit.

GUNITE

The men outside my window
went down into earth
making noise
& a pool. I made
sure to extinguish

each house light
before pulling the curtain.
It's certain what's been said about
the Third & the Treasure Chest—
my view was best.

As from a box seat I peered
with maximum anonymity
over our backyard
at theatrics
paid for by patriline.

But a budget's only that.
What actually took stage
was under my mother's direction
though her understanding
of its becoming

was scarce. Secondhand.
Everywhere there
was only lining. Warm beacons
from the head-
lamps licking crude forms

& the chasm. The substance:
preemptive, a thick paste
with unplace-
able power. I sharpened my look
on a large hose but never saw

its excretion, wondering
is it dark or invisible?
Loud pops regimented

like an exhale against the machine
so I didn't hear Mom's shift

past my door, behind me,
watching me watch
with identical eyes.
She added her weight
to the bed & cupped my crown.

Good night, she said.
Gnite, I said.
We laughed in the same
brief cadence.
She was just as scared.

II.

Flowers in the Dark

EARLY BIRD / LATE BLOOMER

4 am can be Thursday morning
&/or Wednesday night.
In a car heading to the airport
for a moment the sky bloomed
rich & rain skidded diagonally up the wind-
shield, meaning the car was going down.
Meaning myself, my family—
we all were. But we kept on revving
to a pulse of streetlight
that made the droplets crystalline, briefly,
& passed a diner bathed in its own red
name. I wish I could be an early
worker there, spritzing leather cushions.
I wish I could be anywhere
like this forever.

THE TEEN AGE

It was a new bed-
time. We had already lost
so much. We no longer dreamt
in carnations. We no longer
wished to blast
into what our minds made
when we weren't looking.
We dreamt of re-
incarnation.
Then we were afraid.
Then we did everything
not to be afraid,
sucked through the exo-
skeletons of Norwegian
gummies, scrubbed our ducts
clean of their molt.
Then we realized
obligation. We had exams
in the morning.
Look, Nicky pointed
up at a library sky-
light. *A comet.*
We understood our choice,
what it was,
whether or not to ignore
interim darknesses
between wing-
flashes from a plane
flying forth
& at an angle.

GAME

Now that I'm called "young adult"
I've let my therapist convince me
to look around with the eyes

of a hunter. I walk around saying
a deer must be a sign,
otherwise my mother is just some woman.

My mother is just a woman & my hatred
for her comes from Source.
Everything explained. What it means

that my hairs are longer in my dreams,
all of them, down to the knees.
Thicker too. Like ropes. Mom always says

she's afraid of such things—
mammoth engorged things
including the yarn her mother uses

to gesticulate a sweater
into being. Pushing beads
her sweat glands sting every time

but she still accepts the gift, invites it,
grimaces under a grin knowing first
& always how it hurts to wrap something

in the outskirts of a house, the bedroom
where you know conversation is happening
in warmer brighter areas,

celebratory muffle as faraway men
cross lines to get it in. It goes that
there are players & there are games

& you can only hate one. I sit aim-
lessly in the outfield, having forgotten
every proverb's end.

BOXING DAY

Somewhere downstairs there's
my brother— not my brother
but some new ornamental surrogate
who bangs on Bach's bacchanals.

I remember when he astounded
the living room in spite instead of spite
of us. Now the furniture lumbers

down, downwards as does his piano-
play. Polyvinyl spruce sprigs
don't scatter because they don't fall.
Soon all the wrapping paper has been

stashed away & the present
lays itself out mathematically, like data.
I can't remember astounding;

it's too sorry a sight—
this brother of mine
& the artificial tree's sordid
stubs snubbing light.

HONEYSUCKLES

To retrieve a bead of sweetness the procedure was this:
to first sever the flower
from where it sprung,

a crunch below its bowl
telling you a clue about
what comes from the body.
I had none but Trixie did,

led me to her backyard
hedge of them. On the balls
of our feet we reached
for a thicket of the thickest,

pruning until we made
a sizable mound. It was she
who pulled the pistil & knew
when to stop so the glob

sat perfectly on a rim of petal
at the tube's end.
There was always this friend.
I walked with one on train tracks

not too long ago, trespassed
just past the bridge with residual
angst. The crossroads we came
to felt too predictable

so we turned back down
into a river. My pee arched
& splattered on overgrowth,
shrill weeds hissing.

I was clad in stripes
& she was dressed like a doll
& went one rock farther
than she ever had

towards the midpoint.
Another level up, a man
looked over the railing.
Such geometry: this man,

this girl, whatever I was.
Beige flecks in the foliage
carried through a saccharine
odor, no, aroma,

Summer's signature
satiating taste of impossible
or that which is not
quite allowed.

TSA

after Catherine Barnett

To idle, dally & dawdle
I learned from my father.
In security I look back

at him looking at
the government employees
shuffling sock-footed travelers

through machinery, to liberty,
where they dance & test
their glideability.

We glided once. Glid?
You were on two feet
& I was on one

thanks to exceptional balance
I learned from none
of my parents. I've had many

fathers, all interchangeable
save for their political placements
& bathroom grout work.

I'd kneel in the shower
& so on. They'd toggle their belt
buckles. On the conveyor,

each tray bumps the previous along
& is thus a sort of father. But the sun
always manages to find

its place. A little boy runs
to where it falls. His father hauls
him back, tells him *Stay*.

FERN & O

It used to be a petri dish
would bloom beneath
closed lids. The boy was in love
with an opening
& fading of ferns
in radial symmetry.
He lived so soft & dreamt so hard
it was hard for him
to discern what was day.
More recently I fell upon a boy
in love. He was shorter than my usual
so I didn't stop falling
in bed while he slept on
the adjacent queen.
For five nights I turned
his name over my tongue until
it was something else entirely
corroded by enzymes,
a dextrous mouth-
muffled exercise
I hoped we shared
so when it ended we would enter
the same picture:
grayscale, inhaling
Marlboros in Monaco.
He reveals a bouquet but
I can't complete its contours—
I no longer see flowers
in the dark.

IN KENT

My father & I found a campsite overrun by pomp
& sanctioned squarely. The extended families
must've taken their time in the afternoon to bolster 15-
pronged tents, or one father did it all in the fifteen
before we got there. In any case the lot was substantial
so we backed in sideways, our feet facing the lake.

49. My father. Fifty-six. Adjacent others keeping the kids
busy while their numbers kept them warm. We kept
trying, blowing like furious men into our kind of structure,
wondering why nothing caught. Not long after
I clambered back into the camper & made a to-do list:

Pack for Atlanta
Get computer fixed
Find husband
Stay happy—

I opened to rips of merigold over the water.

THE PRESCHOOL

I. PETER

presses his face into the crevice made by pages 8 & 9.
Sometimes I think you want in I hear Mrs. C mutter

for the adults to hear. He's spent the day pressing his face
into things, anything but mostly books & other classrooms.

No thanks I've been taught to say & he pulls away
from the glass to reveal what he made, four oblong clouds

where his forehead, cheeks & breath were.
I used to do the same, but onto a human surface:

my father's hand— extended like a high five,
answered by a faceplant. His palm fit like a beard.

II.

At the preschool there are four age groups
named after flying insects:

Ladybugs (1-2) Bumblebees (2-3)
Butterflies (3-4) Fireflies (4-5)

I'm not sure why these in particular were chosen
but Gabe would tell you they're all three-
syllable compound words starting with two-
syllable components.

Lay-dee.
Bum-bl.
Buh-der.
Fi-yer.

Are babies ladylike? Toddlers certainly bumble,
& though nothing at the preschool smells like butter
the Pre-K room burns with an unembodied force
something like a fire that never stops catching.

III. STANLEY

stands like a teepee going peepee by the gutter.
One by one we recognize the posture, his head

bowed curiously toward the darkening knit.
I pick up the typical responses my colleagues

can't hold: *oh god — ordeal — not this — again?*
But nothing spoken will stop the moisture,

its trajectory down the leg, his sneakers soaking in it.
He must be taken by the wrist, brought out of view,

given what's available. He returns in Ava's spare
sundress: a frilly silhouette gilded by daylight.

IV.

At the preschool Naptime follows Lunchtime
so noon feels like evening with an even
longer torso. While the children adorn their chins

in pink goo from the squeeze bottle it's my job
to unfurl twelve identical mats & match
each fitted sheet to its blanket, labeled respectively.

Ms. K always draws out the *e* in *Cleeean up!* David draws
a seventh turtle. *Purple's your last color* I declare
& he glares with prosperity— an entire bucket of colors

I feel weak prying from him. But I win. Everyone
& the crayons are tucked into place. Fluorescence falls
when I say so, royalty-free lullabies already poking the hush.

We pat to bed the ones that need patting & the rest
observe from their padding until eyelids have other plans.
The crayons & everyone is asleep. Except Nolan,

who repeats aloud indefinitely: *Nolan closes his eyes? No-
lan closes his eyes?* Whispering is my hardest work. *Yes.*

V. HEATHER

has the disposition of a widow, Mr. T remarks.

I wish I were widower myself. I used to be quite widow—

I could only make contact with one surface at a time.

Something about widows is that they love windows.

Both feet anchored on the couch, she faces the partition,
absorbing a screen of happenstance from the other half

of the classroom where teachers are busy making things
go back to how they were. Some rice project I wasn't

here for must be broomed into piles for the trash.

Chairs lock into pillars. Her mouth opens like a gash.

VI.

There's so much music at the preschool.

Like brood parasites the tunes have made a home out of me.

When stimulus yields the same biological response over time
it's called a "fixed action pattern." Think *Lactation*
(*to the tune of baby tears*).

The wake up song goes:

There you are

There you are

I see [insert name] in a ___ ___ car

Don't decide that for them I always think.

Don't put them in that car.

Then I tuck the final folded mat into the rack's last mat-
shaped space. Is it legal to say *Good morning* right now?

An ocean of song is active via actually-
fixed patterns beneath all the room's surfaces.

You just have to find the button.

VII. TYLER

talks only when he swings. He knows how to pump
& who has fish. *I have fish!* His feet fling in front

as if hinged. *Mommy has fish.* They tuck below.
Between whooshes his eyes stay back for a moment,

ossify in midair, catch on the shadow of the apparatus,
how this flat dark version of it refuses to lift.

I want to feel bad for my own shadow but I've learned
the word *diremption*. My body takes the spotlight—

casts a swingset. In this swath of navy woodchips
its arms wear the afternoon spindly & must hang up.

VIII.

Tonight I invited my comfdest friends over
so we could splay on the mattress
I carried from my bed frame
to the TV room floor.

It started being alive,
then awake.

This was a genius move I thought, & not too difficult.
I've gotten really good at relocating sleep surfaces.

I will say it felt fixed when our favorite
song came on & we all started wailing
in unison.

Once exhausted we softened to a whimper.

When babies sleep they exhibit myoclonus
(sporadic twitching).

They are hurtling through lifetimes
in preparation for their own.

IX. LILLIAN

lifts her chin over the big pink ball, her shins over
the medium orange ball, proclaims *Motorcycle*.

She means herself & I begin to see it, but she really
isn't all of it, only her butt's the seat, of course,

& her ears are handlebars. She's more the secondary area
of the machine; wheels are what make a bike a bike.

I turn back to tell her this, to fix her metaphor,
but she's already vroomed through the school

& onto the main road & is making an unprotected left
onto the other road, the one that goes home.

III.

Heading In

EXHILARATION

Today I'm wearing a skirt
which maybe wants to be
a dress but I've stretched
the decorative elastic
with my gut & tucked my tee.
Breeze up my groin
feels flirty.

The bubonic one,
Petra replied when I asked
which plague she became
infatuated with as a little
girl. Every child is an expert
in some tragedy.
It's the rush of being so far
from death, so close
to history.

Nauseated groans
swell from the caterpillar
coaster. The Tuileries
are riveting today.

SUMMER STUDY

Tonight I say yes to everything.

Then I fall asleep
on the bathroom floor—
across the thresh-
hold to it: legs out, head in.
Then I taste bile.

There in the toilet's basin
is a pile of the waste
of my time here. One smear
I never took care of. A dark
clippings-clump from earlier
when I looked too hard at myself
& decided against sideburns.
Chewn lebanese, lamb thrown
in for free because the owner still
recognized me even without
sideburns.

This is heaven, I said
when I first saw the Seine.
(& every time after that.)
It was the red wine talking
to the jet lag. We, the students,
having learned all there is
to know about je-ne-sais-quoi,
lifted overtop the Pantheon
in a semicircle, ogling at
the upturned bowl
of our futures.

A KISS

There must be a compromise
in kissers
when they flay
open for the other.
Their touch is not pre-
positioned except for by
correspondent cinema.
It can be as at odds
as fuse-
ball. My tongue
knows another.
Knows its tongue-
song. They sang together once
& we watched proudly
from the nose-
bleeds. We craned our necks
but no one can see
their own tongue. It's too
far away. & yet,
just like a kiss,
you can see a show
with someone you have no
words for.

I'm sorry
I took your mouth
in lieu of a conversation,
that not even
green eyes
could save you.
I'm sorry it happened
so many times
& in so many different
places.

In the spirit of reimbursement
I have written you
a small assembly:

TROUT

GURGLE

MITOSIS

CHEVRON

ET VOILÀ

"A KISS"

The boy with big dark eyes
& a scrape on his cheek
came prancing. Whining.
I would call it *Unintelligible*
if the etymology didn't edge
Unintelligent. Instead I'll tell you
how he held his face:
like a foreigner who found
a paraffin marionette,
like he hadn't wanted
to come into it yet.

I scooped him,
modeling in myself
the reserve of a mother
of a constant crier.
I was never such a child
but I could play such a mother
& a doctor in one act perhaps too
desperate to master the human
sport, asking in a melody
as familiar as can be,
what do you need?

A two-
word request bolted the mouth
it was raised in. Adjacent
tendons tendered.
The easing was immediate as
thunder after brilliance
from a too-close strike.
It shocked me, not only
what he said but how he said it.
How he learned relief
by saying it.

MYELIN

July passed breathlessly:
a pale mojito ice cube painted the air-

port bar & me delightful. Tipsy. Legal.
I flew everywhere but landed only in my

overpacked randomness. The bag was loud
with vestigial glass, carvings of animals all

borrowed by a warehouse in Los Alamos crusading
ANTIQUES by a locked door. I make quirky luxury

collide around my body & in my dream
with the body-builders on the beach

where I stayed the whole day, so long a fist
began my gut. So long July, cousin August

is waiting with a dagger. Again I'll head in
with clock time & disregard what about it

cannot be answered. In younger years,
in the ocean, I wondered why "heading in"

meant getting out. Now I've started saying it
to the kids I babysit. I've developed a sheath.

FUGUE IN 14C

Taking my astronomy final I forgot every formula
I'd learned to express our position in relation
to stars, there was only that beautiful word *parallax*
in modest typeface. I passed out scientifically,
sitting upright on a backless stool. The professor
clacked over to ask if she could clarify. I was up
& right but my conscience cornered someplace else,
maybe it was teetering on the event horizon
of a vacuum where an event had yet to take place
but is now. On this plane I am redefined by code,
distilled by dimension. Meaning flat. The gate
where I was born into form is a perfect palindrome
of my seat: C41. The word palindrome is a perfect
nothing. Nothing passed, I barely passed
the class, I handed her exactly what I was handed
how it was handed to me, left the room I was in
with no idea of the room I'd be in next.
Obnoxious weather & a puddle from the sporadic
downpours from which we can't seem to escape.
Another professor took his little boy to the edge
of this little body & waited for the presumed response.
But the child hadn't been wired right— he just stared
at the puddle how I stared at him, his reflection
barely folding in the water. Then the other day
I sat in class in the middle of a maelstrom so cinematic
I began to believe it was being projected onto
the giant windows. Lighting struck when someone
brought out a ViewMaster of Kew Gardens.
The way it works: two copies of one image
screech on a rotary, clicking (slightly misaligned)
into view. This creates a phantasmal depth,
eerie as the millimeter our forefingers shifted
while closing each eye. Some say the same can be said
for déjà vu: two retinas perceive at different speeds
& the brain registers a memory. Now I pass over
the wolfish expanses between houses one town over
from my own, knowing all the answers I didn't
pencil down.

NOWADAYS

We're always driving home,
you & I, & I
often think about the oven on

& the cornbread crumbs on
the floor. Carcasses
decorate our together-

space, homaged by idle inhales,
such a return, into us, distended
& bulbous on the bronchiole.

Every sweet tooth is gone.
Our smiles are pianos
I don't know how to play.

MID-MARCH

In a blaze I happened
upon the clavicle

where an oak plunged
for sustenance.

I was not drawn to it but it
drew me, this alcove,

a propped-
up scene, some figurines

arranged by a child or a child's
idea that with enough symmetry

anything could never collapse.
Biased against the bark was

a yellow door, as if to make
the tree itself a facade

of a house from which
a miniature man

with a benefactor's stature
came out to greet me

in his version of a front lawn,
his arms gesturing forth

from a plastic cloak
at two wiry chairs

before him. I don't know
what kind of conversation

he had planned
but nobody in Real Life

could ever sit on something
so small & fragile without leaving

a pile of parts. Just as I
now crouched down

low to the threshold
to see if maybe it could happen,

I could really twist open
& slip through

a younger wonder
where pinecones were considerate

in their falling & animals
cradled each other from

a blast of wind, a blast of wind
knocked the man

right over his loafers, reminding me
how dirt consumes

by tucking things in.
I swept some from

the rifts in my kneecaps
& it was a short walk home.

STOLEN METAPHOR

Once, in a child's mind,
a bridge & a necklace
were holding hands.

I forget—
 which child,
 which bridge,
 which words were used.

Here's how I'd make it:
*At night, the Manhattan Bridge
is a string of pearls hung up
by the sky.*

I am always crossing bridges.

I am always crossing bridges
& forgetting.

NOTES

“Baba’s Biography”

This poem is written with a restrictive form that was introduced to me via “Autobiography” by Michael Dumanis, in which every word begins with the letter A. The content of my imitation discloses my paternal grandmother’s narrative of matriculation into the world of American Judaism as it was recounted to me at a young age. This poem also makes supplemental use of Yiddish jargon.

“Gunité”

Gunité is a pressurized concoction of water, sand, & cement sometimes used for lining in-ground pools to protect the surrounding landscape. This poem also makes reference to the children’s rhyme which goes: “First is the worst, second is the best, third is the one with the treasure chest.” In the West, inheritance typically adheres to primogeniture (rewarding the firstborn son). Here I use an idiomatic principle to underscore my own experience as the youngest of three boys.

“Game”

“Source,” with a capital S, is a bit of neo-spiritual lingo I’ve picked up from the internet. I understand it as a blanket term for all unembodied conceptions of providence or divine intervention. Its placement in this poem indicates the rash conclusiveness that is characteristic of an adolescent mind once it has been granted the social marker of Adulthood.

“TSA”

The first line of this poem draws its syntax from Catherine Barnett’s “Lore,” which opens: “To think, to swear, and to jaywalk I learned from my father...”

“Myelin”

Myelination is a neurobiological process that continues over the course of brain maturation in which a fatty membrane or “myelin sheath” forms around the central nervous system, impacting the rate and expression of neurotransmission. This leads to deviations in behavioral response to certain stimuli. Myelin levels can vary based on both genetic and environmental circumstances.