Kurt Lindemann

THE MAGICIAN'S SON

I am the magician's son. My father disappeared when I was seven, but not before he taught me the art: bending into self like a worm trying to reach its beginning; pulling insides handbag-closed with a drawstring tongue; keeping everything packed and hidden, a tight inventory. He taught me how to cut a woman in half. We practiced on Mom out in the garage. His tools hung on inverted surgeon's tables: saws, pliers, rolled-up Playboy magazines and a motorcycle tire. There was no rabbit, just a possum we found trapped in the shelves one night. It stayed there with the paint cans collecting shadows, color without a use. We pretended it was playing dead, and if I didn't breathe, I could hear it waiting for me to go away.

Mom lived most of her life in the black box. She said she was resting. He told me not to disturb her. I used to finger the shiny side latches, held them like dirty words on my tongue. They were magnetized, and the current kept us circling him, electrodes spinning round a cracked atom. He told me to measure everything before I cut. I breathed metal shavings for years this way—saw-grind, splinter of sound, solids reduced to broom-sweep, working his pattern of disappearing things: measure, cut, gone. Now my knuckles seem knots of air, my skin cellophane, translucent folds when I smile. Do I smile? I split instead. I crack in half and almost swallow myself. A vanishing thought, like dust with the light off, my face half written under the mirror. Strange how the body responds to correction.