

JESSE GRAVES

IN A FAMILIAR CITY

Cities do not preserve buildings just because  
you love them, or to help you relive a dream,  
so you can drink the espresso again on 11<sup>th</sup> Street  
that changed your taste forever,  
so you can watch Ingmar Bergman films flicker  
through the clacking projector at Terrace Taphouse,  
or so you can find faded books in the back room  
above Jackson Avenue Antiques,  
sitting with your back against the shelves  
reading Henry Miller's *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*  
while a passing train rattled the upstairs shutters,  
and particles of dust made wavering transit  
all around you, passing along an index finger  
of light from some higher realm, through a clouded window,  
arriving upon this very page.

SAGE GRASS BRUSHING AGAINST MY SHINS

I went to bed thinking about how my father  
died, trying to exhaust myself silently repeating  
his question, "How can you let them do this to me?"  
Sometime in the night, I fell into a dream  
where he was old and sick, but alive, and the family  
had gathered around him for Thanksgiving.  
After the meal, we went outside and wandered  
around the yard, scattering cornbread to chickens,  
scratching the heads of all the dogs we've ever had.  
I followed my dad past the barn to the pond  
we dug together, listening as he told me how to clear  
the pine saplings thickening along the banks.  
The dream carried me along like real life,  
and I could feel the sage grass brushing against  
my shins as we walked back through the field.  
The kids had all lined up to play football,  
which we haven't done since I was a child,  
before my brother died, before my uncle died.

My daughter Chloe, a girl again, picked the teams,  
“I want Pap on my side,” she shouted, making my dad  
grin and blush, and say, “No, no, I’m too old.”  
“That doesn’t matter,” my daughter said, and I loved  
her more right then even than the dream itself,  
more than I hated how soon I would wake.

“In a Familiar City” and “Sage Grass Brushing Against My Shins” are used with permission by the author.