

My Father's Brother

William Lychack

Pautipaug Hill, Franklin, Connecticut, bright summer and we stop, unannounced, to see my uncle Daniel, my father's only brother, my two-year-old son in my arms as we cross the lawn to the house, to see if anyone is home. The door to the basement propped open,

and we taste the cinderblock cool from below, hear the scrape and sweep, a man pushing water with a broom, the perfect vision of futility, this moment all hunch-shouldered and shirtless in the heat, muttering who knows what to whom, me calling down the stairs before he finds us hovering over him like this.

*And did I mention it was hot?
That it was August?
That I never really knew
my father? That he died when
I was ten? Met him twice? That
my uncle, a version of my father, is dead
now, too, gone a few weeks after this visit,
one of how many times I went to see him?
Three? Four? Five at the most?*

Out in the bright of day, even after I remind him again who I am and how he should know me, he squints and doesn't seem to recognize whose hand he's shaking right now. Bob's boy, he says, Billy Joe—so, what d'you need? And it has, I realize, taken me forty years to say nothing—I don't need anything,

I say—just wanted to introduce him to my son. We stand there in the garage a moment and wait, as if this man is about to become my father, my father almost becoming me now, and the boy? In every version of this I set him down, the kid off quick suddenly, the two of us toddling after him, smiling—sometimes more wistfully than we wish, sometimes less.