

Walking Around

Sometimes it's loss I want, a slow acid eating
my bones, wife and son gone forever,
loss that would color this moon a sad yellow
and give these houses voices beneath their paint.

I would sleep by day, and my grief,
the thinnest of shirts, would hide me
from nothing. At night: the shrieks of birds,
my wife's heart thrumming in the trunks

of the thickest trees, my son buried
somewhere or falling asleep to voices he's never
heard, pajamas white as baby teeth,
the birthmark under his chin a closed flower.

And maybe before following the night's meanders,
I would glance up at these windows furred
by porch light and frost, where my wife
and son are sleeping now, and try to invent

the darkness where we dream, the three of us,
like plants bedded in a window-box, so intertwined
we no longer hear the song of our leaves,
or feel the tangle and sprawl of our roots.

Larsen, Lance. Erasable Walls. New Issues Press
(W. Mich. U.), 1998.

February 1922: My Father's Conception

Leona, Ershel—names chalked on someone's driveway,
names mapping the erasable walls of the heart.
Paired in loopy cursive, they were supposed to fade,
like memory, like the light from the open doorway
of the Elks' lodge after a Saturday night dance,
couples fanning out across the rutted road.

Certainly, no one was thinking of weddings.
Not Leona, not Ershel. Not the town drunk
who saluted all young lovers, with sincerity
and a bottle from the upriver bridge. Not
the German baker working late, who would one day
offer Ershel a life of ovens and floury hands.

Least of all their Mormon bishop, aged walrus,
snoring now beside his flanneled, pliant wife.
And if it was that night, where did they end up—
Leona's basement, a barn loft? Or maybe
a bunkhouse closed for the winter, the wind
and the rustling of dusty blankets

shuttering them in, as my grandfather,
sad country boxer, clenched his eyes against
this new pleasure, fevered colors swimming
through his head, while my grandmother
whispered to the wall, if I hurry, if I hurry,
if I hurry and wash up with vinegar.