

Sawdust

I am watching my father
breathe
in the middle of the living room.
My father is
in the middle of the living room,
breathing,
in a bed.

*—I counted to eighteen that time.
What did you get? . . .*

The thick metal frame
of the bed my father is in
in the middle of the living room
is beige. One, two . . . six little nicks
with no story to tell trace along the footboard
edge. An impossibly large bronze
wheel carves its empty fable
into the sunstroked suburban shag.

Today is Tuesday.
I arrived Friday.

*—He just might push through to the weekend.
Mind you, I'm not a doctor. . .*

I expected this gurgle. I read about it.
They call it a rattle. It sounds like a coffee maker.
It's not a rattle. It's more of a gurgle, like a
coffee maker, working fast. There is no
metaphor here. Here, where my father is
breathing. Only breath.
He loved coffee.

Loved. . .

—Danielle, do you have an extra hairbrush? . . .

I find a picture of the dollhouse my father

built for me when I was eight. I am in
the photo, standing next to it. Leaning on it.
Hip against chimney. Arms folded, dimples
beaming pride. The house was Tudor style,
I would boast of its “stucco and trim!” Some rooms
were painted, some had real-life wallpaper.
The roof was covered with black asphalt shingles.
Extras from my dad’s workshop. I don’t recall
putting any furniture in the house. Or dolls.

*—Yes, my father built houses
most of his life. When we were young,
I always loved going to visit him at work. . .*

My father is lifting and hinging a large wooden frame
into place as we pull up the makeshift drive. Workboots.
Tube socks. Toolbelt. Frayed, homemade jean shorts.
Two men are standing next to him, laughing. One pats
his shoulder—two taps—as my father passes by
to climb a ladder.

I get the lunch bags together.

This house will be our house,
although it seems forever away.

We all stand and talk in the imaginary kitchen.
Bologna with mustard on stacks of raw plywood.
The sun pops out from behind a cloud, and

*—I got twenty-two that time.
What did you get? . .*

as my father unfastens his thermos cap (always
too fast!), we laugh,
and glimpsing his ritual
grimace-twist-&-spill,

—The same? I don’t know, twenty-four, maybe. . .

I breathe in the sawdust.