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Morningside Heights: Fragment of a Film

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MORNINGSIDE HEIGHTS: FRAGMENT OF A FILM

George used to say we all need an hour a day
to meditate. He lived alone next door
to a woman who played Schubert's Marche Militaire
on the piano, and a man who grew
flowers on the fire escape.

That was summer 1946 when George's brother
returned from Germany with a German wife
and two adopted children. Picture them
in George's livingroom sleeping on cots,
eating Cornflakes, speaking broken English

to the tune of Schubert's Marche Militaire
through the walls: there is a photo of Roosevelt
over the radio, and the unmistakable cooking-smell
of an old apartment even when nothing is
on the stove and the windows

are open, as George is opening them now,
looking out at something in his backyard:
although it is morning, it is already so hot
that leaves are literally dropping from the trees.
Heiss, says George to his nephews,

ist sehr heiss. . . .

Now, as if a film had stopped, picture
him frozen in gesture, speaking high school German
forever, his mouth caught in a grimace with *heiss*,
his eyes wide-open, intensely blue.

By 1951 one of the German nephews would be
dead of scarlet fever; the others would return
to Germany, and George would move uptown
where he himself would live only four more years
and die in a car crash. But in August 1946

picture him in his pajamas by the window
with his adopted nephews—smiling
slightly, strangely, his lips about
to part, his eyes about to blink
as he focuses. . . .