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Fasting on Yom Kippur · *Mark Halperin*

Today the pear trees wrapped in shawls of air,
the wind that bends them booming with frogs—
but I am not wearing a new blue suit. My hair
is not perfumed spikes of black that poke out
under a white skull-cap. This day each year
the Law added our sins to our fathers'.

All the Jewish boys were absolved
like trees that drop their foliage
all at once. We'd play at prayer and fasting,
at emptying and the chest-thumping of grown men
till sundown. A few remaining leaves scratch
and their dry cough recalls the drone
of men in prayershawls, the tinkle of glasses
later, a table heaped with herring and sardines.

My heart catches. Netted, it bangs
louder. We stiffen, our yearly rings
unbreathable armor without forgetfulness.
Without memory we repeat our fathers, slip
and vanish around the trunks of pear trees.
I fast today. I walk out past
the unpruned orchard,
nostalgia's branches clacking.