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Marks of Light

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MARKS OF LIGHT

1.
Unlike a photograph
which can be destroyed,
a man carries in his head
the father he would have
no part of. At a railroad
crossing, he stops his car
to watch the train
cast its light this way
and that, each tree
a momentary comfort,
lit like a forest home.

2.
Once I asked my father
for a picture of his father,
and he looked through me
like cold air
while the night bugs went on
thrilling with late summer.
I did not know that even then
his father, posed in a black vest,
was hiding somewhere in a corner.

3.
The next day will arrive
and leave like a blank
patch of sunlight
on the cement floor
for the one who refuses family:
leather scrapbook tossed out,
unfilled. The father
moves across doorsills
into the daylit chores of memory
as behind the garage
a mole pushes the dark around all day.

4. Hillside kudzu thickens and smells like hard grape candy: office pockets of returning fathers. The little son dances on the car’s backseat waiting to pick his father’s pockets. He can pick this man out from all those evening sidewalk marchers. Same corner, the day after shining like the day before.

5. Monday returns to how hard men work, a history of each day passing surely into a flurry of machinery, ledgers. Fathers and sons sum each other up, pacing two strides, then three apart. Parting.

6. In the corner of this old desk drawer, I find a photo of my father’s forgotten father, two men with the same eyes. One harmless now, colorless as leafmold: the man he would not speak of
stares out with familiar austerity.  
Cold—a fathering weather.

7.
A man stops in the field,  
reluctant to go farther  
than what he knows.  
In the starlight  
he senses something  
he never quite got  
enough of. Looking down  
at his boy, he murmurs  
*another September,*  
*just what we all need.*  
His son stares at him,  
then out at the cold distance  
to the stars,  
marks this as memory.