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Zoetrope

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JOSHUA RIVKIN

Zoetrope

A BLACK RIVER is what I imagine will open in the dream I'm still having. Not awake but awake.

The dream does its tiny light show, a zoetrope invisible to the waking. An ongoing happening in my absence.

I imagine your mother reading to me. She says everything will be fine. Everything will be right as snow. Your mother

lovely as a tea kettle.

IN ONE DREAM a dog on the isthmus of a hill points her face into skunk
and future. A figure like a donkey kicked star on the forehead of a man.

I am all inside and forgetting.

I think of the emperors who built grand cities with citizen bones, how
they left hieroglyphics unfinished to mark the world

always, and still, becoming.

I THINK: ladle of the moon, broken bit of the drill, castaway butter dish.
I'm trying to fill one worry with another.

A quiz: Would you rather wake up in the body of a polar bear or wear the skin of a lizard? True or False: Gunfire can be heard across town. Yes or No: The cars echo like perfect rapids, one sound clasped to another.

This zoetrope of desire, of dream. Zoetrope, literally *life turning*, isn't a word in Greek but formed by the collision of need and invention and commerce.

Turn. Fragment. Break apart. Repeat.

SLEEP ISN'T the island or the ocean. It isn't the moon or the dream of the moon. It's the sky above a shipwreck, stretching blueness with no place to stand. A sky clear and bright:

a July heat wave, a bad houseguest, an unsatisfied lover. Sleep isn't death. And it is, and it isn't.

Sometimes, pacing, I carry a glass of water filled to the top.

I carry it as if it were a flashlight in the dark.