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Rue

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MARK LEVINE

## *Rue*

I was a traveler in my day  
a business traveler, territorial  
in the grassy gaps.

I sold bonds  
to clients hungry for bonds  
in the boundless sales call  
door to door among  
“folks.”

It was a job

I was born with.

I had a heavy sample bag  
rubber-banded stack of calling cards  
and leather binder  
(embossed)  
opening upon a vista of  
lamination, obligation  
rumination.

I furnished

a nation to the chemical engineers and wives  
of Schenectady, New York,  
over coffee, over roast beef  
and piano, a kingdom, a nation, a  
principality, landlocked state, aspirational acreage,  
spiritual fallout hideout.

I showed a picture of my boy  
cross-legged in front of a backdrop  
of a glaciated hanging valley  
deep in the transaction  
among handshakes and signatures  
if it came to it

This is my boy, I said  
Come to me.

I was a traveler.

Later I inspected

the nickel mines near Sudbury  
telling my boy about the endless  
sheer black subterranean drop  
in the cage.

I was telling the truth  
when I knew how to, as I had to, as  
sales required, as stewardship permitted, long before  
disembodiment.

I kept a picture of my boy  
in front of a cardboard tree and treehouse platform  
tacked to the upholstered  
partition above my desk.

Once I brought him to the office.

He stared at himself.

“I had a treehouse then,” he said.