Northern Liberties

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This time I am going to tell the truth about what happened the day we drove through your childhood by mistake.
As you were shifting into third, you said, “My God, it’s Commerce Street,” and there we were, idling in front of the yellow brick house you lived in with your Jewish grandparents and your young, crazy parents, the wrought iron gate you climbed still standing underneath the giant lilac bush. The store where you bought caps was advertising Jewish religious articles. Across the street a Roman Catholic Cathedral with pink marble pillars and blue tile loomed holy as a witch’s sugar house, selling Novenas on Tuesdays at ten.
We turned the corner and drove around the block following an arthritic trolly past the long gone open market with beets lined up on trays like the earth’s skinned hearts. When we came back to stare at the old house again, the sun had shifted between buildings and shot us in the forehead. The lilac breathed fire.
I could see where you had fished for mackerel from the second storey window, where your pets lay buried, where you dug a hole to China with a tablespoon, where your Irish father leaned across his tart-tongued Jewish lover with the improbably beauty of a tree turning in the fall.
In a minute the Rose of Sharon spread all over your back yard like applause and the door to old Mr. Greenhagen’s house slammed shut again. You shifted into first. “Well, that’s it,” you said, looking at me. And you pulled into traffic as though out of a dream.
I did not lay my finger on your wrist to stop you from going anywhere you wanted even though it may be to the place we both now know is China. Time has already stopped so many things you want. I will say nothing that is not true.
When I looked back, I saw, beside the lilac bush which had turned its green and natural self again, a boy running the streets of Northern Liberties into his feet, looking for you.