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September, You Remember The Ottoman Empire

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Marilyn Krysl

Days like this you remember grade school, the smell of pencils, the hot, whirring drone of the clock as you brought forth the names of the great metals: platinum, zinc, manganese, copper, silver, gold, mercury, chromite, vanadium, tin. Antimony was important in peace and in war. The core of the earth was liquid nickel and iron and fact was muscle. You were bigger than anybody. You could have walked all the way to Duluth for a start. Whole zones of the earth as yet unmarked by your boot: Tibet and the tundra— that rug over Russia. Jungle, savannah, glacier, the moon. You were capable of just about probably everything. The teacher sat alone at the end of the room. So it was decided: you would go among the great populations. Tokyo six million then. Africa shimmering with tribes. Tanzania, Chile, Bolivia, Guam. The whole Chinese nation starving and teeming. Arabians in silver tents against the desert’s storm. The invention of the knout. The Slavs and their snows.

In Ohio there is no history. Beside you Harrold Gene was chewing gum. He was fat, and dumb. You were thirteen. How you ached to get into history: Jesus, Mohammed, Eisenhower, Churchill, the Queen.