

Temporary Storage

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Books last longer than lives,
but memories are carried along
forever — fiery and iridescent.

My grandfather says
his library will go to me
when he dies — or if,
I'm still not certain about
the prospect.

His gesture smacks me, plasters me
against the wall — like a Pollock — and
asks me to do the impossible:
arrange my own incoherence.

How do I knowingly engage in this wicked trade?

It is going to happen, though,
the books will be passed on and there will be
no need to accept them on my part,
just to wait, but this waiting itself feels
wrong, sinful, like I'm unwittingly supporting a cruel,
obscure scheme — a clumsy stumble into a bookcase sending
the rest toppling down like dominos.

Within this creaking mechanism is a continuity.

The past is like a well-worn book I can
hold up in the air, feeling its heft. It leaves a
rectangle of dust on the shelf marking its
timeless place.

The future, though, is a new purchase, fresh with
crisp pages, which will someday, far from now, hopefully,
be old and battered, and occupy its own
dust-place. At present it points to unimagined
and unimaginable cosmic directions, all entangled within
and extending from the
warm membrane of the past.

Now I am at the beginning of one such trajectory.

Trembling, I reach out and choose a book.
My fingers spread over its pale cover.

Slowly opening it to the sound of its
stuttering spine,
that old-book smell is released before I place it
in the box with the others.