

The Art of Salvage

poems by
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DOWNSTATE
LEGACIES
Normal, Illinois

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Prologue: Certificate of Origin

That beginning
of which we speak,
emergence into being
seen and named

August 19, 1940, 11:10 PM, it says
here on this brown document

the moment of separation

after 6 1/2 hours of labor

from the maternal body

the mother—white, housewife, age 25

not the systole-diastole,
scatter-return of pulsing
anonymous cells
mixing a human potion *in utero*
from two batches of DNA

the father—white,
service station manager, age 27

still less the ancestral grit
from upstream creeks—four-
then eight-fold, and so on back—
swept down in diffuse narrative
lines to that time and place

Crawford W. Long Hospital,
Atlanta, where Doctor M. P.
Pentecost, and L. Thornton, RN
anesthetized the woman and hovered
near until she had brought forth a son,
whose eyes they treated with 1%
silver nitrate solution, lest the mother
be a carrier of gonorrhoea
and unwittingly blind her child

and not at all
the ambient air
and foundational earth,
the intimate gravity
of the local, the weight of distant
events bearing down

on that hot Georgia red clay August night,
the wooden blades of overhead fans
humming through the humid air,
anesthesia and sightlessness
soaking the half-lit room

having flooded already across Berlin,
Paris, London, into Auschwitz—
even into Mexico, where next day
one Ramón Mercader, a Soviet agent,
would take up an ice-axe and calmly
split open Leon Trotsky's head.

|

I saw a grey-haired man, a figure of hale age, sitting at a desk and writing.

—H. G. WELLS

Morning Pause

She silences the cruel clock,
sighs, turns lazily onto her side
and reaches across to cup his warm
skin-pouch—soft nest for the two small eggs
inside—against her palm. He stirs;
she kisses him on the shoulder.

 Their minds
are climbing like mist into the light;
their indolent bodies are sinking, heavy
and still in love with sleep.

 He replies
in mirror-form, his hand resting
lightly along the low hills and central
valley of the *mons veneris*—warm too,
rising-falling on slowing waves
of breath.

 Soon the familiar touch
of the long-partnered, settled pair
has done its work: all their cells
are realigned, reset and ready
to lift them up to tidy the covers
and join the day, already in progress.