

What to Keep

After the operation, after the casket closed
some years later, your father's glasses, which he
had sent you through the hospital to find

Of course the powdery water-damaged portraits
of great-grandparents, survivors of shtetl,
steerage, Hell's Kitchen, assimilation

A ball of road tar from a wooden bridge –
underneath, you'd seen a waterfall, a pond,
massive roots shadowing a bullfrog

Her sharper smell behind the ear when pregnant,
her true silence, and that she forgets herself,
standing and lying, laughing

Photos of your kids (now grown) at two:
with yogurt on her face; him, reaching for the camera;
one together, cheek to cheek, at kitchen table

Don't forget your secret (nothing, really) –
a fragrance walked through, calcedony eyes, silver voice,
posture upright like a dancer's (a nothing never had)

What to keep is what's already lost, past having; a great
circle, having – a dream of stillness, momentary, meridian
between imagination and memory's distant poles

-Herman Asarnow