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Things You Almost Had Before You Lost Them

At seven I wanted to lose my thumb
have it sewed up like the raw greasepacked
sausage ends you wince at in the deli window,
wanted to fabricate excuses for not shaking hands
wanted to pretend I lost it in a small kid's ear
just like my father used to do.

At nine I wanted to lose the hair on my crown,
arc the small tuft on the right
until it stretched for the smaller tuft on the left,
wanted eventually to invest in a toupee
only to lose that in a strong Chicago wind
when standing in line to learn
first hand
that I was losing my job,
just like my father did.

At 13 I wanted to lose my younger sister
just as my dad lost his,
wanted to be terse with all people
wanted to be so angry with the world
that I'd lose my temper 20,
30 times a day,
strike at my best friends,
just like my father used to do.

At 19 I wanted to lose my left leg
watch it get sliced off by a steam engine
after a long night at the tavern
two fights
and six or seven dares that I wouldn't
spread eagle on the tracks
wouldn't stare down the cyclops light of the 207
just like my father did.

They say when you lose a limb
you still feel its presence guiding you,
twitching, itching
you reaching to scratch it.
And when you die you are reunited with those things
you had before you lost them: your thumb
your hair, your sister, your leg,
even your appetite
but not necessarily in that order.
My father told me all these things as he dropped the
bloodstained
knife and the tailless squirrel he
found pummeled near a roadside trash barrel,
into the kitchen sink.

Richard Amidon