Belongings

Bruce Smith
BELONGINGS

Into the closet in their bedroom that day, summer, into the hot box of breath. What was I looking for? In the dark among their belongings, my cheeks first brushed a heraldry of ties. On a field of business blue, black, slashes of egg yolk, dun. This man will not show his nerve. Neither the suit coats of exact saturation and hue, each with the right arm coiled like conduit, like intestine, each with its extra pair of pants, radiant on the seat. The shirts the Jew-boy, Jay Gatz, discarded. Hung on their wooden shoulders, black wires from the neck.

On her side nothing flimsy. Peignoirs of flannel, skirts of worsted gabardine. Nap and fuzz. Pieces I'm still ignorant to name function, form or texture. But this is sick, fingering these women's things.

What I found there with the hems and belts on my back, a letter in a shoe box in his perfect hand: “I've never really been the kind that waves the flag, my dear . . .” The rest is shrapnel and traction, a return in two years, sleepless on the first night of his discharge. A night full of the noise of stars. She's in her slip on the chenille bedspread when he covers her . . .

I forget all but the opening and the edge
of the letter that I remember still
takes my sweat into its fiber.
Blood in my members, in the rooms
of my chest, there,
the source of my forming.