

Closing Time

MICHAEL PEARCE

In the Jewish Museum my mother says
come look at this but I just stare
at *shtetl* sketches and pretend I don't hear her.

In the Jewish Museum are two little tables
one with blue dishes and one with red
and lots of words about how to use them.

There's a map of Israel composed of faces
young and old that talk to you in hopeful voices
when you put your finger on them.

My father sits on the front steps
of the Jewish Museum waiting for us
reading a book about Einstein.

There's a booth where you can sit
and watch old TV shows
with Jewish stand-up comics.

I think of my friend Kronman
who likes to go to the Jewish Museum
but won't ever go with me.

The holocaust room is in the basement
and the cello music is so quiet and slow
you want to kill yourself

then you realize that such a thought is
like every thought that crosses your mind
in there a desecration.

My mother has become so tired
that she finds a bench and lies down
and starts snoring like a pig.

The guard stands by the entrance
suspicious of my dad sitting on the steps
but he doesn't say anything.

The Poland room is packed with stuff
and looks like it was curated by
three people who don't get along.

In the lecture hall a confident woman says
Hebrew is thriving but Yiddish is dead
and she seems pleased with that.

I see a Hasidic father and son
and feel like I don't belong here
but I don't want to leave.

I step out of the Russia room
and there is my mom sitting on her bench
smiling and humming a song I don't know.

In the Jewish Museum there's a room where
something ancient and transcendent happens
but I'm not allowed in there.

I sit down at the table with blue dishes and
call out that I want a burger and a milkshake
and my mother cringes with shame.

I'm standing in front of a Chagall when
a loudspeaker says it's closing time and my mom
tells me she'll wait out in front with my dad.

The Chagall shows a crucifix and people running
and an upside-down face and a house on fire and
I am cursed to be born without history.

The guard tells me it's time to go but I don't move
and when he puts his hand on my shoulder
I shake it off and sit on the floor.

I hear them talking about me and I hear
my mother's voice calling but I keep sitting here
I will not leave the Jewish Museum.

