

Departures

DAVID THOREEN

I was skating laps on indoor ice, weaving weightless
through the graceless throng, my windbreaker filling with air.

The earth turned toward summer. Thirteen, immortal, I was
flying a motorcycle
down an abandoned runway. The needle on the speedometer
quivered.

In my underground den, I opened my textbook to bank failures
and Hoovervilles,
listened to Cat Stevens leaping and hopping on a moonshadow.

I'd joined the Columbia Record Club, twelve LPs or cassettes for
\$.99. I had mail—
cardboard boxes the size of birthday cards. Now I knew invoices,
money orders.

I joined Steve Miller, singing to a *big ol' jet airliner*, and *goodbye to
people we'd trusted*.
Like poor folk in fairy tales, we'd somehow make our way in the
wood of the world.

My father's uncle, in and out of the hospital ever since I could
remember, died, finally,
my father framing it as a word problem: *If your uncle's wife leaves
him for his best friend,*

true-blue pal since prohibition, fishing buddy, navigator, wingman,

how many years
will Uncle fall down the stairs? How many days, nights, weekends
will your mother

sit at her table, drying her eyes? Suddenly I understood I
understood nothing.
My grandmother's rosary, her constant muttering, pinching one
bead after another,

decade after decade—her *Our Father's*, her *Hail Mary's*, her *Glory*
Be's,
her brother drinking himself to death for thirty brokenhearted
years.

My father and grandfather took me to empty his empty house,
a growing feeling of pure forlorn.

Decades before my father died, I boarded a silver bird, blasted
down the runway,
rose into the air, bringing all this history with me.

