

LUCIA PERILLO

My Father Kept the TV On

while the books lay open, scattered face-down
like turtles sunning, the jackets hunched, with a little
hump in the hunch from the trough of the spine
bearing a white sticker with the typewriter's courier
font rendition of the decimal system
under the wrapper, hazy like fog
taped to the book, the tape's yellow orange-almost
(depending on how old) reinforced with threads.

Meanwhile his eyes drifted back and forth
back and forth until the book slid to the floor.
The flag then. Then snow. Or the corporate
eyeball – all night the night would watch him,
plural, *them*. Just ask my friend whose father
was a drunk, a highball glass on the nightstand and a swizzle
stick to mark his place. Still, on Thursday nights
he stumbled down to the reading room
to leaf through the new arrivals.

Oh green republic where the pilgrims came to land!
If I'm going to choose my nostalgia it is a no-brainer
that I'm going to side with books, with the days
before the lithium-ion battery, but after
Philip Roth and John LeCarré were born, books not too
high brow or too low, but sometimes thick
and overdue. Books the fathers read to escape us
who were the shackles that the plodding days
latched onto them who'd started out their lives with war, so this
was perfect, courting danger in their underwear,
feeling the breast of the vixen stiffen,
slipping their hands into the thief's black glove.