

Roald Hoffmann

Basket

—for *Billie Ruth Sudduth*

to carry
somewhere
to someone
for a good
reason

to keep
something
meant
to be
kept
apart
safely kept
for someone

out of
something
grown
but cut
twisted
or shaved
so dead, yet

reborn,
no,
trans-
formed
in the hands
of someone
usually a woman

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shared
space
carved
out of air
by one
over
the other
under

a construction
in which
you
can have
a stake
actually
you'd better
have many

a way of life
where
upsetting
is inevitable

where
the ends
need
to be
concealed
and the means
laid
bare.

stakes
high
stakes low
every basket
a gamble

along
a spoke
out of sight
(but not of mind)
tapered
to be
hidden

not
the only
part of life
where
in and out
out and in
can
tire
some.

where
loose ends
are part
of the plan

and
entwinement
flirts
with
interpenetration

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the lesson
of a basket
Billie Ruth's –
an elbow
can make
a heart.

Tectonics

genesis

Not God, or Rabbi Loew.
Today it's just Roald,
squeezing a ball of clay,
his small stake in creation.
Did they begin this way,
two thumbs
hesitant in clay? Yes,
for now
there is the other,
a hole
in the wholly round.

he remembers

He was six;
June 1944, five Jews
walking out of hiding
to the Russian lines,
the fertile fields
sodden
in spring rains,
no way
but through the clay,
his uncles are leaning
on the women.
His mother carries him.

take clay

A thing with magic
begs
to be understood.
Kaolin and feldspar,
hydrated
aluminosilicates,
layer-like,
taking up water,
platelets sliding
past each other.
Reversible
to a point.
This lesson
May be of use,
but who
will do
the kneading?

centrifugal

in a world
of seductive
tugs out,
and not just
at the wheel,
all you can do
is keep plastic,
balance,
and build,
by hand,
the higher shape
within.

a hand

of clay is not
the clay hand
of a broken idol.
It's a woman
in Angola
reaching out
with a can of milk;
it's the hands,
now two,
moving nervously,
of a man
told his son
is missing
in Chechnya.

subtractive

so now
this wet object
faces me,
ample evidence
to being far out
of the creators'
league.
But God
was into salvage,
I recall, and
my teacher says
there are tools,
all those fingers,
a grater,
a curvy metal disk, and
this slip slurry.

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Formation
is as much
a matter
of taking off
as adding on.

my hands

on the pot,
remember, oh,
how
they reached out
for yours,
hand over hand,
one spring
Rio day.

where

people were, there
are shards.
There is clay
on my hands,
there is clay
in my hair.
It'll wash off.
Not the clay
in my heart.