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Traveling Leaves

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Traveling Leaves

by Sarah Luke

Plastic teeth of the rake under leaves,
tip toe steps in pink tennis shoes
because this is where the yellow jackets
make their nests—under the earth—
your hand, Hannah,
between my dirt-caked fingers:
this is the other world, the thing
you can't forget.

Inside the house, the stovetop
decorated with oil-stained pans
piled up to the underside of the microwave—
I mean, we had nowhere to store them,
but that wasn't the point;
the point was the staticky radio
and our father's hands
drumming an old Billy Joel rhythm onto a glass,
a near-empty bottle of ketchup
that gasped when you squeezed it,
our mother, one hip against the sink,
propping her elbow against a
corner to wring out
a wet towel for our fingers and all
we wanted was something to dip our French fries into
and to know who would claim the last fry.

The pockets of all your jeans are now filled
with makeup-dusted quarters, mine
with thrice-folded receipts from the drug store
two months back. Where did the time go?
I don't know; does anyone?
Leaned against the rooftop of my car
in late September, thinking

about the autumns that have come before
and all those that may or may not come after.
I forget that yesterday
is just another version of tomorrow,
all its redundancy and bitterness,
that the leaves I raked into a pile
in the backyard yesterday
are now traveling through the woods—
the same leaves.