

LAURIE KRUK

## Skywheel: Niagara Falls, Canada

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“Every day, one quarter of the world’s freshwater  
rushes down this gorge,”  
our guide yells to us,  
*Maid of the Mist* yellow-garbage-bagged tourists,  
shoulder to shoulder before the roaring,  
who paid for the privilege of being safely soaked.

Fifty years ago, my parents; now us, two kids in tow.  
Squirring honeymooners turn into families steering strollers  
bearing ice-cream-stained tots, t-shirts proclaiming I’M THE BOSS,  
all caught in the cycle: rolling from bus tours to souvenir shops to Ripley’s  
museum—featuring the shoes of the largest man in the world—  
in a restless quest for replenishment of dreams,  
or what we want the future to witness: the big  
picture, larger-than-life, *Believe it or Not!*

Like the view  
promised by this gigantic rotating sun  
that looks down on both American and Canadian wonders  
and draws my daughters’ arm-waving shrieks  
as we join the ticket line parade.

But then, like the tantrumming toddler, at forty-five, I  
decide to plant my feet, refusing the ride.  
From a park bench, I watch while

gondola 25—my girls, their father—rises  
and falls, a dozen times, shadows blotting mine  
as I wave, blow kisses  
at their faceless silhouettes,  
one of two dozen plexiglass eggs  
chasing after their descent  
before the fall  
away from mother, earth.

Safely grounded, I ponder my fate,  
if the ride never ends:  
wandering into the Casino, finally,  
nothing to lose. Or at the hotel pool, going down  
the slide to plunge under, then climb onto  
the patio, a chair, no one there.... Somewhere near,  
a child screams, my eyes fly open: fear  
flips into laughter as her mother hugs her. Look up,  
and they are rounding  
back to me, mouthing *Mom, Mom!* Or so I think.  
One more  
turn over the brink,  
and they glide down to earth,  
are mechanically unhatched  
by yawning summer staff. My older  
daughter is redefined, blond hair  
springing with her like sunfire. Shrieks, “You missed it!”

And I nod, hug her, re-enter the circle. More families aboard,  
the wheel  
turns on above us  
as we seek bundles of compressed meat, sticks  
of melting sugar. Meanwhile Niagara continues its endless cleansing.  
Some things  
you cannot wish undone.