

**MY FATHER LEAVES VILNIUS**

On the night they  
leave Vilnius, he  
brings goats next  
door in the moon.  
Every move must

be secret. In  
rooms there's  
no heat in, no  
one puts on  
muddy shoes

or talks. It is  
forbidden to  
leave, a law  
they will break  
like the skin of

ice on pails of  
milk. My father  
doesn't have a word  
for *America* yet.  
His mother presses

a brother to her,  
warns everyone  
even the babies  
must not make a  
sound. Frozen

branches creak.  
My father shivers  
when his father  
sees men with guns  
near straw roofs

on fire. It took  
the old samovar,  
every coin to get  
someone to take  
them to the train.

*Poetry*

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"Pretend to be  
sleeping," a man  
whispers when the  
conductor moves  
near. A grandmother

I never will know holds  
a mortar and pestle  
in the quilt of  
chicken feathers my  
father still sleeps in

years after he is knocked  
sideways into the ribs  
of the boat. He is so  
sea sick he can't swallow  
the orange someone throws

from an upstairs bunk,  
bright as sun and smelling  
of a new country where  
even his mother will  
become a stranger to her

self in and forget why  
they risked dogs  
and guns to come

**Lyn Lifshin**