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Barry, the Psychiatrist

Lawrence Matsuda, poet

Without a greeting at the Thanksgiving dinner,
Barry approaches me and insists that
my mother was under
great stress before my Minidoka birth.

He believes my DNA stress switches
were turned off in the womb
and anxiety tolerance levels raised.

As a child Barry survives
a Jewish resettlement camp
in Poland after the war.
He says both of us *need* chaos—
our bodies can withstand hunger
longer than most. Good times
and happiness make us nervous,
we compensate by overeating, risking diabetes.

He claims my mother never gave
me the “facial shine” of love as a baby,
a look both he and I crave as adults.

Good day Barry,
my response to his early morning
discourse without preparatory niceties.

*Mother always had a shine
for her grandson, Matthew, I reply
being glad for my son.*

Barry wrinkles his forehead. *I know*, he says
and then resumes his “prenatal stress effects” diatribe.
Mentally I curl up into a ball,
mainline internal chemicals again.
All those prenatal stresses pumping fresh in my veins.
Like a heroin addict I don’t want them
to degrade over time like radiation
and leave no trace of why I want to chew nails,
burn ladders, and stomp the saki cup.