Mrs. Ramsay's Knee

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ABOVE THE TOWN

Because she loved him, he wanted to take her flying above the town. And so, there they are, big in the sky, the rooftops of Vitebsk all below, parallelograms in shades of green.

Just looking at them, odd like that, so much exuberance in the curving lines, it’s impossible to know: how did they do it? He of green earth, she of sky. Paint thin as watercolors.

She floats, a swaddle of blue dress, her shoes pointed, with a single strap, modest, a little apart. His arm around her, his hand at her breast. She’s having a fling, her hand out front in the sky, as if she were Superman, as if the man she married is following her lead. He was in love with her all of her life.

His black boot, the darkest spot, drops clumsily, his other foot is lost in her dress. Their faces are blank, dove-gray. But he’s done it, has lifted the girl he married in a Sunday sky. We cannot go where they are.

Among the green houses below, one in the center is red. Windows are hatched like tic-tac-toe. Fences are vertical shades of black and gray, a wandering crinkle
of boards, each pointed with a sharp stroke.
A ladder leans up to a loft,
a miniature goat is browsing.

There are no people in the town except
a tiny old man on our side of the fence.
He’s bent in that peculiar shape
of acrobats before the backward flip.
His pants are dropped. He’s about to take a crap.
He’s looking so hard at the ground,
he couldn’t possibly notice what is filling the sky.

I look and look until
my mother’s kitchen fills
with the sweet butter smell of a cake
she makes for my father,
until I hear the song he sings for her:

*Ah sweet mystery of life . . .*
The heart aches and aches,
and, because it must, grows wings.