

LAURIE KRUK

Skywheel: Niagara Falls, Canada

“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.