

Ten Pin

by Jonathan Lam, in the spirit of Poetry Day

Yesterday I sat in a crowded place
in a small town far from home and comfort
with “hall of fame” in its ignoble name
full of adults shouting and kids sweating
and I was one of the children there who
sometimes got up to play some kind of sport
under the glare of parents’ eagle eyes
where you pick up a smooth and weighted ball
and, to the roaring cheers of the adults
you swing it in a haphazard movement
up, forwards, backwards, down, up, down, forwards
—a math guru’s dream in parabolas—
and then you let go, let the weight go free,
go free a room’s length towards a triangle,
a triangle of strange and oblong shapes;
and then it was my turn, and up I went,
with nemeses, well-dressed, lying in wait,
I picked up that blue sphere with three fingers,
with hand sticky with anticipation
and I swung like the others and let go
and it traveled in a curve down the path
and the shapes flew wildly as they were hit
and the adults started getting louder,
raising voices in the clamorous room,
hurting my heads with their incessant cries,
the fake support like acid on a cut
so I turned away and closed my eyelids
but they all stopped mid-yell as they observed—
and I saw with a feeling of dismay—
one shape in the far right corner, rocking,
rocking slowly sideways, righting itself,
goddess Hope losing her cheerful pink glow
as it remained there, strong and defiant,
a testament to this game’s chancy odds
the sole survivor to my wrecking ball
and a wrecking ball to my bowling game.