

**CHANA BLOCH**

**Aperture**

—*to Benjamin and Jonathan*

**1**

My father stirring sugar in a glass of tea  
and I at his bedside, asking  
little questions that fit inside  
the big ones I didn't dare ask:  
he might have figured out he was dying.

**2**

I'm dying. Not to worry: not any time soon,  
I hope. But just so the two of you know.

Should I burn the journals?

**3**

Such a quiet man, my father.  
As a child I learned to read  
the blanks between the words.  
More blanks than words.

What was he taking with him  
into his death?  
I sat there day after day translating  
his unquiet eyes.

**4**

What a narrow aperture  
between parent and child,  
cramped as a mail slot.

It's a wonder anything gets through.

5

My father woke from agitated sleep.  
Cossacks slashing and burning again,  
banging at the door.  
In the terrified silence of the hospital room  
I heard him crying for his mother.

6

I saved a picture one of you made at six:  
black hair bristling, the face bright green,  
legs planted apart like stanchions,  
and what a belly! A fiery furnace.  
“That’s what you look like when you’re angry.”

You were right about that fire.  
I burned a lot of things in secret.

7

But night after night, I recorded  
the unabridged  
version of the day,  
black ink on blue-lined paper.

8

I wanted to save the two of you  
from the misery that filled our house.  
Even smoke-blind,  
I saw your serious faces asking.  
It was you who saved me.

Would it help you  
to know the scope of my confusions?  
The journals are full of secrets  
but maybe you know them without my telling.

The key to the safe is under the sugar bowl.