

Holding Hands

By Andrew M. Shaughnessy

We should stay.

That's what you said on our third date, on a stormy night
in Hamilton. Holding hands. Rain pounding. Pounding.
Torrents of growing feelings we could not restrain.

That's what we said when we saw the brownstone,
halfway between the subway and the train, a marker
for the compromises we said we could make work.

That's what we said when we saw the pine seedling—
a *sapling*, you insisted— named *Ebenezer* at the house
in the suburbs we didn't need for the kids we never had.

Ebenezer would be fully grown now, had the new owners
not cut it down to make room for the oversized swimming pool
that the kids they'll never have will never use.

The brownstone is gone too. It turns out a location halfway
between a subway and a train station is the ideal spot for a park-
ing lot—frenetic activity going nowhere. How did we not see this?

The memories of a third date and special first night in Hamilton
are gone as well. Only the storms remain. Anger pounding. Tears
ponding. Torrents of spent love we could not restrain.

We should go.

That is what you say when, without frostiness,
we realize our paths must diverge, not at the
threshold of some proverbial wood—

some fictitious autumnal place where placid
contentment and happiness fall softly like leaves,
sentimental curiosities obscuring the path forward.

We accept the road diverges. That's what we'll say.

We hold hands.

In a while, we will go.