

Kevin McNeilly

Daedalus

He told me he preferred things to people.

Machines responded to his unhurried
hands; I held the flashlight steady, and watched.

He chuckled to himself, coaxing stripped bolts,
fixing mistakes. I fumbled after him,
artless, baffled by cryptic instructions.

My mind wasn't mechanical, he said.

The doted-upon, talented first son:

during a fit of tears when he was two,
his mother shoved pieces of a door-lock
onto his high-chair tray to keep him quiet,
a puzzle for the nascent engineer.

In half an hour, he had it assembled.

He spent his boyhood making model planes,
gas-powered, guy wire-controlled replicas
he'd launch from the tail of his father's truck.

I remember how he'd spend most evenings
down in his workshop, dodging the squabbles,
doing repairs. The basement was a mess
of tools, a war-zone through which only he
could pick his way. When I was six he built
his best plane, his baby, a scale Corsair,
hanging it from the pipes on the ceiling.

But the suspending cords slipped and it smashed.

Sometimes talk was like pulling wisdom teeth.

One night out on the back porch he announced
he wanted to make another Corsair.

A citronella candle singed the wings
of cabbage-moths numbed by its waxy reek.

As I listened to his deliberate words,
I resolved in my given way to be
no second best, his pride, no Icarus.