

AMIT MAJMUDAR

Professor Librescu

Everyone else was startled. Only he turned to the sound
with a nod of familiarity. *Found me here, too.*
Far away wasn't far enough. His chalk clicked on the tin tray.

On the board, the work of his hand:
Diagrams of wings, equations of lift and yaw.
Swift, sure curves, numbers, dashed lines.

The chalk on his fingers was the living white of his hair.
What drew you to the study of aeronautics, Professor?
Things on earth worth escaping:

The column of blue sky between jackboots
leading a boy of twelve into his future
like a column of fire through the desert.

He had heard gunshots before. Not here in Virginia;
in Bucharest, in Tel Aviv. Glass gravel on the pavement.
One backpack bomb could clap the whole sky full of wings.

Brittle as a bird himself, seventy-five years old,
he turned his back to the door, his face
to his students and the bright windows of escape

untouchably far across the room.
I am sorry I could not keep you
innocent of what I know:

That this is what history sounds like up close,
that the flight of bullets has nothing to do
with real flight. Bullets have no wings,

no hearts inside them the way
the smallest sparrows and aircraft do. Bullets
are just shot, and the sky does not love them.

This is what his mother named him: *Live, you.*
As if it were an order, *live you live you live.*
Live he did, until the shots and shouts

began down the hall, and he recognized
the sound he had escaped all his life.
How fortunate I am to stand here,

to put an old man between you and this.
While his students dropped from the windows
like birds leaving a nest

the door jerked under him five times
with whatever was out there.
Blessing them all with wings,

he bid them *Hurry*, bid them *Fly*,
his eyes lifting from his emptied classroom
to the open windows, and the open sky.