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After Chagall

Steve Bellin

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After Chagall

for my Father

1.

From the burning shop at the center
of “The Flying Carriage,” one’s eyes
are drawn to the edge, where

a green goat is beginning to pull
itself and the cart up
into a yellow sky. The driver,

startled, has just given himself
over to the flight, arms frightened
into ascent, the way Elijah

might have felt when he curled
his useless body as the chariot
galloped out of the mute river.

2.

When a building burns, it turns
in on itself. Heat builds
from the inside out, like a fever,

and emerges from the roof
with nowhere to go. There’s a man
with a pail who’s forgotten the flames,

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house within a house, bursting
through the windows. Someone he knows
is leaving this life so slowly

he won't blur at the edges.

3.

The body is a charred room
left open to the air. Now the woman
trapped in the blue night begins to sink

among the stones, ground that effaces
her figure like a startled ghost.
Who can say why the shop

won't stop burning, why the driver
is frozen in his escape, hung
just inches above the red earth?

If the next life comes,
may we stand still for it, burning.