

Mnemonic

I was tired. So I lay down.
My lids grew heavy. So I slept.
Slender memory, stay with me.

I was cold once. So my father took off his blue sweater.
He wrapped me in it, and I never gave it back.
It is the sweater he wore to America,
this one, which I've grown into, whose sleeves are too long,
whose elbows have thinned, who outlives its rightful owner.
Flamboyant blue in daylight, poor blue by daylight,
it is black in the folds.

A serious man who devised complex systems of numbers and rhymes
to aid him in remembering, a man who forgot nothing, my father
would be ashamed of me.

Not because I'm forgetful,
but because there is no order
to my memory, a heap
of details, uncatalogued, illogical.

For instance:

God was lonely. So he made me.
My father loved me. So he spanked me.
It hurt him to do so. He did it daily.

The earth is flat. Those who fall off don't return.

The earth is round. All things reveal themselves to men only gradually.

I won't last. Memory is sweet.

Even when it's painful, memory is sweet.

Once, I was cold. So my father took off his blue sweater.

Li-Young Lee