

The Cave Painter

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Memory is a series of caves
in which perspective invents itself,

learns the language of images,
mixes egg white with hematite,

and presses to a wall
a pigmented finger or piece of lichen

to record what it sees.
Holding a torch, she roams

the network of passages,
trying to find something she recognizes

amidst the thousands of images
drawn haphazardly over each other.

She interprets the juxtaposed layers literally,
takes comfort looking at things

that never happened,
like her five-year-old self holding hands

with her five-year-old father,
because the images seem whole

and therefore reliable.
Sometimes the torch doesn't last,

and every step brings her further
into a black so complete

it's no longer color but sound.
Panicked, she sits on the ground,

arms around legs and mumbling.
This is how we find her

when we enter her room,
a white nightgown puddled on linoleum,

and this is why she doesn't
know who we are.

