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Six Degrees of Separation

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Angela Sorby

Alice B. Toklas was alive in 1966,
but my parents (being themselves) were absorbed
in buying diapers, paying rent, blowing up
the blow-up pool—
so it didn't dawn on them that if
they dropped everything
(golf clubs, keys, oven mitt)
and flew Pan Am to Paris,
and rented a Mini,

they could find Alice B. at her flat in France,
resplendent in a black wool dress,
marinating half a lamb,
and they could set me on her lap.
Most laps are chairs: dull and sturdy,
but hers would be itchy and dense
like a college lecture
in twentieth-century history.
and her hands would be cold,
betraying a lingering

nostalgia for the Vichy puppet state.
But we missed our chance. Alice is dead,
and so is Freud., so there's no one to say
that my parents (*mother especially*) are to blame.
Every life is its own flame.

And now, in the summer of 2003,
George Bush is peddling a "road map to peace,"
and Eminem is touring, and the world teems
with historical figures that my son will never meet.
Just today, Gregory Peck died. And where were we?
We were sitting on a tilted picnic bench
in Milwaukee.

Son I'm sorry.
The sex-ed books call birth a miracle,
but what they don't describe is me lying helpless
and bloody as you were born.
I could only carry you so far.
My muscles pressed *eject* and then
My cry was not your cry,
while outside, who can say what wild
cargo passed us by?