SLICED BREAD

In line, outside of the Hollywood Ralphs –
Security makes us wait.

So we wait, spacing ourselves;
On high alert for anyone who coughs.

I wonder if there is bread.
I have never wondered if there is bread before.

This is new.
Then I think of my grandfather

Waiting in some Russian bread line
On a snowy village street

While The Soviets
Pushed in from The Eastern Front.

Or my father – hungry, poor –
His teenage teeth already beginning to decay.

Stealing bread when he was
30 years younger than I am now.

What was the scene?
His 15-year-old mind

Calculating risk;
Plotting to feed his family.

Were his palms sweaty?
Did he innately calculate the math

Of a tiny heist
For some baked wheat?

For some reason,
I am comfortable thinking about bread.

In 1943, The United States Government
Banned sliced bread

In some sort of attempt
To reduce the consumption

Of flour, or steel, or wax paper,
Or paraffin –

There was a theory
Whole loaves of bread

Might reduce flour prices;
Help bakeries keep costs down.

Who the hell really knows?
But here I am,

Waiting in a line,
Wondering if there's bread.

After a while,
Supermarket doors part

And the line centipedes in
And then disperses; each human

Traverses a trajectory
Toward his or her need.

I head for the bread aisle.
There's one loaf left and it's my brand.

And it's sliced
The way evolution has promised me.

I decide
To gather a few more necessities

When I catch, from the corner
Of my eyes

A man in a black hoodie
Steal a blue bottle of Gatorade,

Slip it into the back of his waistband;
Making it disappear with the stealth of a magician.

My gut response: call him out.
But I don't and feel shame.

Then shame paves its way
To a shoulder shrug;

I have no idea
What he's going through.

I even see him make his escape
Through the same sliding doors

That swallowed us all
Inside.

I used to work in a bakery.
I would pour 50 pound bags of flour

Into stainless steel vats;
The size of moon craters.

Then the water,
The yeast, sometimes sugar.

It's truly a simple
Recipe, really.

Yet, it was the currency
That helped build the pyramids.

Millions of people
Have waited in lines for bread.

Have murdered each other
For the bookends of a sandwich.

I'd dump the dough
On enormous wooden tables,

Knead it,
Slice it,

Roll planet shaped balls
Between my naked palms.

Plop the dough into pans,
Brush egg on top,

And set the raw future
Into ovens large enough for human bodies.

But here I am now,
A failure who let a thief escape.

I could have turned things around –
I could have just said, hey man,

Lemme buy that for you.
What is it, two, three bucks?

I could have offered help.
That's what I should have done.

That's what we all
should have done.