

Translating His English into English

And so was the brief: fetch the 'pinch-bar'.
I peered into the small shed,
a corrugated cave of tools and such,

but I didn't know what a pinch-bar was.
Back to him, I asked what it looked like,
he scolded: *pinch-bar! pinch-bar!*

(Is it sheepishly? yes,) sheepishly
I journeyed back to the toolshed. Inside,
quick: forage, hunt. Not the wrench—

not the tape measure—not the nails,
nor the hammer—not the axe—and definitely
not the car battery. I took a stab

in the dark: could you be the one,
or you? I called you out. I spoke
into your name, pinch-bar, but

your syllables mirrored my hands,
no thing, no use. I came back bearing
bad news. Empty-handed.

Perhaps the pressure of the job
expended his patience, so the moment
gave rise to a dialogic fiasco.

Enraged by my ignorance (not the time
for the unknown and doubt)
his temper soured the air

as he lumbered hazardously
down to the shed
and in an instant re-emerged

with the instrument hoisted out—
'crowbar', I said, and there was no relief
knowing it had two names.