

A
T

THE
LEPIDOPTERIST'S
HOUSE

Female Collector

Story hoarder, keeper of notes folded
in Latin class, stubs of dulled drawing pencils,
bits of wool sheared from the neighbor's ewe
(dyed pink or glossy white, like pearls),
drawers full of music boxes, the petty feuds of girls
(detailed in journals: grade 2, grade 9), coins

unearthed from extinction: Swiss francs, lire.
An entire life is possible to fold
away. The adolescent faces of girls
you grew up with: round, blonde-framed, penciled
in a litany of proms and first dates, adorned with pearls
worn by mothers and grandmothers. This older you

savors the dusty film forcing a U-
turn back to that time abroad, Cyrillic alphabets and rubles
pocketed as proof you watched the Neva purl
against its banks, that you never once folded
your hand when it came to risk. The future pencils
in a calendar filled with the birthdays of girls

now in their thirties, swaddling baby girls
who stare from photographs, their wide eyes trying to figure you.
So many dried tubes of paint, so many saved pencils—
graphite and charcoal, white. They are precious as coins.
Here is a cigar box of shells; here is a flag folded
by somebody. Three separate sets of heirloom pearls.

The needles your mother used to teach you *purl*
one—all those uneven stitches a girl
has to learn. Bright colored paper folded
into origami cranes; the names of those you
once loved creased, faded by time, marked
by post stamp, scribbled in archival pencil.

The vision locks on a self-portrait drawn in pencil,
your own eyes bodiless, black-centered pearls
that swim up through the dark like Krugerrands
sunk in a shipwreck. This is the record of a girl's
lost treasure, long stowed and loaded onto U-
Hauls, settled in closets, shelved and refolded

every time she's had to fold. Now the rain is pounding
luminous pearls on the glass; now another you
smudges the pencil features of the girl.

At the Lepidopterist's House

47 Bolshaya Morskaya Street, St. Petersburg

Their colors only fly by day. I always found them trembling on leaves as chrysalids, flitting from phlox to foxglove with new wings, soundless in the thrum of early summer. I was sitting

on a bench on Nevsky Prospect once, waiting for life to get exciting, when a monarch broke the dullness of an iron gate and tore the afternoon apart. One art

is like another. I wrote my sentences to show slow phosphorescent motes and caught my net on beauty. There's always more to know about the world, the whirring light. Obsession taught

me patience, made me attentive to the shape of thoraxes and microscopic veins, the bending arc of stems. The killing jar is never where it ends. Inside the glass, the vanished landscape

magnifies—its iridescent shades preserved in scales that seldom fade in banishment or shame. My ephemera are pinned, hanging from every wall, though nothing ever stays the same.

The house front goes; the once opulent rooms brim with the ravenous gaze of travelers, and I myself am just a traveler whose vision zooms in on the tiny fibers of my coat. Stitches unravel.

I once remembered all their names: skippers and coppers, sulphurs and swallowtails. Their metamorphosis beguiles me, and while I know the past will never stop her badgering, I'll rest awhile inside their glorious disguise.

Corvid

Grudge-keeper, harbinger
of the bad, black darter
in new grass, dull-billed and raucous
worrier, hoarse talker and tempter
of dogs and fed-up farmers,
keen swallower of rain-logged worms—
your caw nags at the edges
of sleep. You, who live a double life
and flock sometimes to one roost,
sometimes another—dark quill mark
at the margin—imperturbable
flapper that rasps like a cold frost,
like death. You are the restlessness
stored in my bones, a forecast
that claws from the half-murk of dreams,
reminder of blank spaces in leaves
and damp lichen; sly robber of low nests,
when I see you I see only bleak skies
and brown pastures, though the lawn is still teeming
with green, the clouds billowing summer.
Around the tucked wings of your brothers
shade gathers, and dry larches turn
murderous, sougning their prophecies.

Self-Portrait as Eris

I no longer comb my hair.
My tempers swirl in all directions.

Once meek, once carefully groomed
and caught in the gnarled grip

of manners, I have let fall
my girlish robes, holding

instead a small dagger, a chill
that sits at my hip, tethered

by air. I am the bitterness
rising like bile in the dry throats

of mourners, of spurned women
whose desire has grown tired,

whose loneliness whittles a hole
in the heart of the coveted apple.

I've rolled into the clearing, looking
golden and sweet. In the eye

of the sea-storm, at home, I will crouch,
wearing my old bones and sheltering nothing.

Krugerrands

For Betsy

Buried just behind the granite post
that marks the outline of my garden, the gold
grows colder. Its presence is my family's lore,
and like most myths, it seems fantastic, old;
some muggy August days it is a sore
that festers in the earth, or else it is a ghost
entombed below my heart—hepatic, dark.

All that the gate of love let in I've tried
to stone out—restoring toppled walls that littered
my pastures with feldspar and quartz—lost
fortunes. Blinded by bullion glitter,
we were naïve to what our secret cost,
and let the myrtle grow. Its rich leaves lied.
I can still see the heaving shovel's mark.

A Letter that Never Reached Montreux

I never visited your grave, though I've got my canceled ticket from last August, a ferry chart, pictures of fields I imagined brimming with Queen Anne's lace, the late knelling of crickets.

I don't know what it is to never go home, though, years ago, I looked up at the arched ceilings your father owned, rows of glass cases busy with specimens, once-treasured nets—I took

so many photos. I remember plummeting down to the deep stations of the metro—gold carved columns and blue marble walls—like buried treasure hoards or death chambers. In the little town

where I was born, my father rests under a white pine, and he died like that, gazing up between evergreens at a February sky. The winter is mine.

Summer never granted me the flight I needed, though I watched herons, ravens and hawks, butterflies whose names weigh down their lightness.

Those months, I found a kindness in the sun, a blessing in its constancy. But in this season, it's the moon that waxes, pearl-like, a naked woman dressed

in her own luminosity. I wore a pair of wings last Halloween—lifting and black at my back. I've seen your drawings and the air

sharpened by monarchs each September; I found a luna moth sunning herself on hot pavement in the month when my blood thrummed, when I never heard the roaring sound

of jet engines, the pop of my ears as we rose steeply to elevations no live body could survive.

I want to tell you that I have loved deeply

in this world, that I have known the true weight of a heart
in a plummeting body, that I have learned how to scream
myself calm on the interstate, windows cracked, my throat finally starting

to open. I want to gift you that song, of dried grasses
windblown at roadsides, of lost flight patterns and homes
reconceived as this bright dream hurtles past us.