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fog : memory

I thought it had left me, but  
it had only receded for a time—

Along the shore beads of moisture  
cling to the snarled kelp

like mementos, *little souls*—

The Bush Warbler Laments to the Woodcutter

I offered you sanctuary with one condition.  
Even this much you could not hold.

When you looked into the forbidden chamber,  
my three daughters became birds  
and flew away from me forever.

Memory of our transgressions is a stone. It lies  
on the seabed of our deepest forgetting.

*—regret and sorrow in the making*

Before you came I swept this house daily  
with a long broom of rice straw.

Often I would wander from room to room,  
touching each treasure as I passed:

a golden screen, three red lacquer bowls—  
Now, all is dust suspended in late sunlight.

This forest house, with its paper doors and secrets,  
is too large for me now. Let it dissolve in mist  
and absence, no trace left for the lost children.

What am I but the flower of your deepest self?

*—crushed chrysanthemum petals underfoot*

Instead, I am cast out across vast distances,  
circling far above the trees, never to be human.

You will say that a grand house once stood  
in a forest clearing. Then: nothing but birdcalls.

Longing itself is nothing but the heart's open spaces.

*—regret and sorrow, come calling*

If I could make it so, I would be the one left alone  
in the meadow, rubbing my eyes and wondering.

Remember this: I, once a woman, took you in,  
an exchange for a promise kept.

Three maidens startled, then transformed into birds.

Whatever you abandon returns in your dreams.

After Reading of the Expatriate Writer's Death  
by Shipwreck  
*Margaret Fuller, 1850*

The ochre roads of Tuscany had blessed her,  
without fail, all those years of exile, the sun bright  
as a brass plate, day after day. Olives. The sweet  
dumb cows lolling on the grassy slopes. From  
the little room where she wrote she could hear them,  
the soft clunking of their neck bells, dust rising up  
fine as powder as they crossed the road for milking.  
Buckets of the frothy stuff. Butter and cream,  
the casks stained black with fat. Figs and oranges  
fragrant in the heat. In the evenings, leaning  
against warm stucco in the darkness, goats bleating  
in the far pasture. Smell of horses and mown clover.  
How could it not have come to an end, the sea merciless,  
the exhausted crew desperate on the breaking decks?  
I imagine her last hour, kneeling in the narrow cabin  
with her husband and son as the ship creaked and lunged.

What prayer could she possibly have offered up then—  
the salt swells swirling and foaming around their waists,  
  
then their shoulders and necks—to have that life back,  
even a fraction of it, after so much unmitigated pleasure?

In the Valley of the Kings

*Recently, a Canadian woman fell into a tomb  
while hiking and fractured her leg; no one  
could hear her screams, and she spent the days  
leading up to her death writing postcards.*

I remember heat—savage, alabaster,  
banging off the bleached cliffs.  
Ruined Thebes not far, stone wreck  
in a strange sea. Then the shifting  
not-earth giving way beneath me.  
Three days submerged, breathing  
the dust of dead pharaohs.  
In this choked sepulchre the divine  
and the damned are equal at last.  
No gold here, picked so clean  
not even bones remain as witness.  
Overhead, a patch of broken light,  
a dry wind hollow and constant—  
and the darkness, which governs  
my nights and my days. This pain  
weakens me, and no hope of water.

Kiss the children for me. Tell them  
I have found the door to the next world.

Tell them I am entering history.

## Stroke

When she comes to, darkness. Then silence ticking like something alive. It occurs to her that she is lying on the floor on her left side. No feeling there, only a resistance, a reversed weight pressing up against her. Through a window, masses of white flecks pass across the pane. Snow. She imagines she must be cold. She imagines she could have lain there for hours. Vague shapes lean at peculiar angles in the gloom. Chairs. What might be a bookcase, only she can't make out the books. No memory of falling. Difficult to remember anything at all. A tightness beneath her skull. No pain, only a dull pinching, persistent like an old wound not quite healed. She thinks of the hairline ridges that form on the skin of sour milk. That kind of gathering. Her entire left side is without sensation. She tries to raise herself. No use. She attempts to speak. A sound like a worn hinge closing. No words. Impossible. She could lie there until daylight, hope for a visitor. Nothing to do but wait. Nothing to be done. White flecks, electric, drive across the pane. No memory of falling. She imagines she must be cold. Silence ticking like something alive.