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HYACINTHS IN KNOXVILLE

Arwen Baxter

I come from a long line of female suicides—
I'm gonna count them one by one,
queuing up outside the ladies room,
with gin and rope and steel and wire,
coat hangers dangling off the family tree.
Fear death by water
she calls in cavernous whispers—
by far the most popular this season.
The sailboat was missing for seven days.
We tried to recall what the thunder said for the men in suits
but we do not speak their language.
They cannot taste the metallic static on the wind the way we do—
Finn's hounds—we can sniff out our bleeding sisters,
that's why Plath, the cat, the mistress and her daughter
are all in the same house
they say we sync/sink with each other and the moon.
Drip drop drip white noise of the fluid drop—
the sudden stop in the hyacinths.

We come from a long line of malleable royalty—
wax figures, yellowed, leaden, and pliable
wick'd and kerosened.
We were civil and disfigured—
thin platinum locks plastered to protruding spines.
We kept in darkness, rare lizards—
glue like skin peeling away
from the pads of our fingers at the piano forte.
We were running from what was hollowed out for us,
the void underneath fresh pink cotton.
This is a long lineage,
like the Khan who sired a thousand sons
she sired a thousand years of woe—

memory enwombed in void,
passed through dull braids in mahogany boxes.

We lived as aesthetic monks,
aroused within the melancholy of the particular,
pure subjects of the universal emptiness.
I have the capacity to make of myself ash in the powder room,
an empty object on the stream of will-less cognition.
I could be a vessel of the sublime,
like all those goddamn cliffs on the Mississippi river
named for the women who leapt.

