My Great Aunt, Who Did Not Speak Italian, Between Chores

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In shade, she cocks a hip and looks along the line of elms, the pond a thick flat green in August. That man from town, what did he say about waterfowl, fish and rain? Conservation. To conserve. To keep. She crosses her arms and thinks: Near Calcutta, a brittle band serenades the train bearing west into liquid sun (she is sure she left that picture there, that stack of journals in the bamboo rack near the kitchen pump) a train loud with beggars doling groveled coins for a trip to worship cattle and cobras. Imagine! The dead float out to sea on dark rivers while beasts roam the city like lords and deadly snakes cannot be killed. She drops an arm and the train stops. Another and the last coin sticks.
to a more practical palm. She draws a deep breath and the dead dissolve into the sea, the band falters through a last horrible measure, leaving the sharp whir of locusts and frogs. Real cattle drop their heads to stagnant water at the base of the hill. Inside, a man calls, a man propped in bed doing paint-by-number parrots. In the house, a crippled piano. Breathless clarinet. Twenty china dogs. Phenobarbital. Artifacts. In there . . . paralysis and clocks.

So cattle drink. The train plows on. Sun collides with a pyre of elms. She hears her name and tries to think. She hears her name and bites her lip and says, "E molto distante?"