

HANNAH DOW

Realizations While Staying in Other People's Apartments

It is not difficult to imagine that we could live
here, together, with the hanging plants,
Swedish soaps, strong water pressure.

At this confession, you turn toward
the wall's discerning arrangement of framed
maps and suggest we try finding ourselves,

our histories. *There we are*, I point to a shade of blue
that could be heaven—this, a betrayal
no less mundane than any of my others.

What is heaven but another word for
prison? The great gray mass of North America
reminds me of places I think I will not travel—

those which recall everything I know
and do not know about you, us.
The only thing I want to know right now is

what use it will be, after I have died, to look back
on the map of my life and see how many times
I was near to you and did not know it,

all the ways we might have saved each other.

My Mother Tries to Teach Me How to Pray

When I fold my hands together I do not think of
my childhood bedtime ritual: doubling my small

body under yours to kneel where you were kneeling
to ask the Lord that we might live another day. When

I fold my hands together I do not think of you, but of
an almost-lover who folded sheets of paper into birds.

Dear dove, he'd say, kneeling beside me as I closed
my eyes to stars and he bent me into the poems

he tucked inside his pocket. Unlike other mothers, you
never asked me to close my eyes when I prayed.

Even then you must have known the fear I had—not
of darkness, but of sudden light—the knowledge that

everything is made to disappear. When I kneel, I think
of begging for my life. I have learned to call this *prayer*.

Bildungsroman

*Trumpets without tongues, we wove lilies
into the baskets. When they asked us
what we meant by these, we'd say "mary, mary"
and be still. We lined the baskets on the sill . . .*

— Eleanor Rand Wilner, "Without Regret"

Trumpets without tongues, we wove lilies
into the shoots of one another's hair.
Light into dark into light, I'd never seen
anything so splendid or straightforward.
Your fingers moved with the unruly
patience only a child can manage,
and I remember how clean
your palms were despite our digging,
gathering. The way you folded
stem over stem, green over green

into the baskets. When they asked us
to come inside, we obeyed and left everything
behind. And when they looked away, we danced
in the kitchen to your father's smoking
songs. You lifted my hands
to your shoulders, the shallow
slope of your neck. Each time I glanced
at our reflection in the lofty windows,
I knew we were each imagining the other
into others, into saints—and if ever asked

what we meant by these, we'd say "mary, mary"
but mean "man, man." (Or I did.)
When did I make myself the tragic one,
find the perfect flower to take me
far away from you, pass myself around
and into the soft and unkind hands of numb
and unkind men who never drew me into themselves
the way you drew a field of lilies with a single
embrace? You taught me, like a trumpet, to hum
and then be still. We lined the baskets on the sill.

The Seafloor of Your Heart Sings Against It

Something left you late this morning,
so says the untwisting of small tracks.
Now you field-note what you are learning:
that whatever left you late this morning
came to make a fossil of its warning.
Yours is a loneliness that doubles back
like the animal that left you late this morning
& the twisting & untwisting of small tracks.



Steve Lautermilch, *Palette (Gebo)*, photograph