

Tania Pryputniewicz

Nefertiti Among Us

The TV's neutral male voiceover
covers what we love about Egypt

and their pharaohs: house-sized rocks
that formed the pyramids dropped in place

without machine, sentries to this day
guarding the embalmed dead, the slight

queen's beauty and betrothal to her cousin,
the nested outlined peacock rings binding

her eyes. *Someone must've hated her,*
the woman archeologist granted

permission to view the body cries,
wiping tears and her sheer scarf

aside, shards of her black earrings
swinging, toenails painted coral inside

the ribs of her sandals. She's the first
in a quarter of a century to have this honor,

and fears she's the last, gesturing numbly
with a dusting brush to the mummy's

lime-white face, a gash where the mouth
should've been. *Who could've done this?*

she repeats like a sister, from spans of sand
she crossed on camelback and foreign floors

she stood upon for hours in line to gain
this access, countless midnights hunched

over hieroglyphics til they rippled away
off the page like heatwaves, til she slept

with her shoulders square but tilted right, knees
to the left to match the jut of chin in sympathy.

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Ophelia (after the painting, *The Rescue of Ophelia*, by Christine DeCamp)

First over the basket's rim: a handful
of strawberries, ripe cherries, meant

for him, the simple garnish of pinecones,
the white petals of daisies torn

from the dusty orbs of their hems. The queer
eddy of her thoughts, circling possible futures

void of men, queen, court; the dark mallow
of cattails loosed idly by her thumbs.

The tug and rip of ditch weeds, stalk juice
greening finger-beds, wrists, dank clumps of dirt

clotting her toes. Buttons she kept buttoned,
ivory as her hair, til garland braided

and tip of limb beckoning. Not for love
of him, as the centuries assume, nor

murdered father, but a weakness in the tree
itself, some prior injury to the trunk

she could not fathom she was climbing
towards, the amber glint of ants, skirts

snagging on bark as she straddled
and clung, intent wholly on hanging

her final braid where it best could be seen
from the ground. *Not doubting the stars*

their fire, poetry irrelevant here,
nor even faulting him his tirade,

but to be alone outside the castle walls
in the untended terrain of acres

she played in with her brother as a child, small
salve for the shock of hiding's result:

how quickly men kill men; she'd pray
for rain, watch it come. Instead,

the maddening snap and surge of falling
interrupting her wish, adrenaline wreathing

the wide unfreckled forehead as it broke
the river's skin, blur of mother,

owl, soft moth of body folding her
back in, head resting

on an immaculate embroidered pillow
bordered by the visions of nuns.