

## The Historian Returning Home

All the lights are on but no one is home  
and no one is reading meanings in the perfect  
illuminations. Someone has arranged shells  
on the mantel along with an ancestor's  
pocket-watch inside a dusty glass dome.  
Something lived inside them once  
though we don't like to think of the snail's  
body, the oozing interior of cowry or conch  
the way we do the watch in some tweed vest  
ticking like something alive. Too, there are  
ancient keys from the old market on the  
Oltrarno. Their iron gives shape to some  
idea of a Medici's secret door or Hapburg's  
strongbox. So there on the mantel are keys  
to locks no one will ever find across seas  
and continents. Days stretch out across amber  
and ochre distances where light leans through  
windows and dark presses in, as it does now  
that he's home and has gone around to flip  
the switches off. For now he has found  
the true way: moving through furniture  
by memory, touching a lamp, a doorframe,  
nearly turning over a cup before brushing  
his fingers over the cold iron of a lock,  
then losing it again in the warm, velvet dark.

## Old Woman Raking Leaves: Sonata in A Minor for Solo Flute by J. S. Bach

Fingers love this grip even worn to the same  
caramelized striations as the rake's hasp, even  
when her joints have the same looseness as leaves  
abandoning a branch, even when her heart lurches

with the same clunky inertia as the furnace  
stumbling through ignition on the morning of first  
frost. Everything here seems to speak of  
solitude's slow steep climb down, fingers' curling  
into flex, as if they were destined to fit the stops  
of an instrument she never played except here on  
this November morning combing through these  
scorched pages of sycamore's diary confessing  
the same pointless romance with blue, gathering  
notes that might have described a way to feel that  
might have had consequence back when birds  
began their colloquia of worms and berries, back  
when soil swallowed leaves and memory.

Somewhere deep inside the woman sitting in the  
nursing home is a woman who remembers a song  
that played through her mind while she raked, like  
the woman she sees out the window, back when  
she let the world hold her fury in lacework of rake  
and leaves and music unreeling forlorn to tell her  
what it is to love in return, to hold and be held.