

On my grandmother, and her decorative watering can*
GINA DECAGNA

Separated by generations, separated by our storied lines, between us rests
Walking we were, weaving through the wreckage,
continually altering actualities, our ideals bestowed in divergent formulations,
Memories of wallowing in our diction, wondering how to climb out,
and yet, we must
Waking now to a bird’s nest, fallen, on the ground
gather ‘round, woman to woman, the eldest, elder, and the younger.
Plumage taken from its vantage.

Define us by our relationships, I plead in poem, and not by our possessions,
Loquacious am I — and you were —
and yet, here you are, her decorative watering can, untouched,
what perlocution you used when you spoke of the olden days,
never used on plants nor hands — I’ve taken you because you are inheritance.
necessary, we redeemed, you confided, for but minor electrocution of the spirit —
Your golden spirals breathe life into gardens, when I’ve been afraid of losing you,
locomotion so glamorous, so unassuming, for so long.
grappling with how to reconcile sweet you with your unshakable acrimony.

Just a sweet cherry lolly, upon which we sucked and continue to suck,
You are a body among bodies, and one day you’ll return to the earth’s garden, and
and remember the stupor of life, regretting.
this is what I have of you, to remember and to remain, in jangly metal.

Realizing what you were —
We forsake our sins and remember the good in moments of wet eyes,
lacking — and quiet now, no longer attacking —
ayes for the woman’s conquests, adventures bold —
larking in the meadows when bejewelled,
You were picked up as an antique in the East Village,** or so I was told,
yet lurking in the shadows of swept-up dust, your words
luscious black, inscribed with yellow gold, a “teapot” we’ve named you,
were lopsided from the top, biting,
that would never be touched, only an elongated, curvy sprout,
and emanating meager consciousness.
stretching its long, long neck,
From you to me, you pour your lavender and rose perfume,
with a tail that dips up in the end, just as a quail’s tail feather.
slumberous in repose.

Your inscribed spots and stripes of gold tell more upon closer inspection,
Slowly now, arousing from your slumber, allowing for some introspection —
Woven, intricate gardens of vines, twisting, and meticulous, flowering bursts,
between the wooded banks and garden vines, slithering lark that you are —
در بهار، ما برای دیدن باغ های زیبای گل سرخ می رویم
riveting jettisons, you flow forth, your soul within, if I can only imagine —
a slade before us, here, to see clearly, of your black and of your gold,
و عطر گل های سرخ و شکوفه های صورتی
in prayer, always a treasure to behold.
at times slighted, at times seeping,
همه جا را پر می کند
When you come to me,
entwined yet filled with sorrow, you pour forth,
will I forgive?

* My maternal grandmother, who is currently in her 90s, has had borderline personality disorder for most of her life. This diagnosis became disclosed to me when I was in my early 20s. My mother, as her primary caregiver, has had to wrestle with many years of verbal attacks. After a little time passes, my grandmother often has entirely forgotten what she has said and shows her love through kind gestures.

** New York City.

*** In what could be translated in English as *rose water sprinklers* گلاب پاش from the Persian language, what I may refer to as a decorative watering can, in the American sense, actually originates in Iran. These metal vessels hold *rose water* گلاب, made by steam-distilling the crushed petals of freshly handpicked roses. Rose water has commercially been used in many perfumes and fragrances, as well as to flavour tea and desserts like ice cream, baklava, and nougat. It has been a significant staple in the Islamic tradition, from spiritual cleansing rituals to alleviating medical ailments, from insect stings to emotional heartbreak. (Note: The holiest Islamic site in Mecca, The Ka’aba, is washed twice a year in rose water, exclusively.)