

THE IMPROPER BURIAL

To the woman buried in the basement

Dear Nadia, you've left too much to find:

A *New Yorker* cartoon scrapbook, tracing paper
used to sketch your daughter's hands,
and a nest of abandoned letters webbed in a flower pot.

In your final days, your children were buying
the world with your money.
You gave your best pantsuits to the church,

and planted these peculiar flowers that come to life
only in the month you died; their orange buds
stroke the grass like fiery worlds turned against earth.

The stamps on your daughter's letters
have almost erased themselves—clay-headed
princesses, butterflies and plump birds.

Did you know the dog-lady across the street, who reads
the newspaper to her Labrador and stirs tea with her
fingers? When the landscapers work she stays inside.

And there's William—the electrician in the gaudy yellow house.
His toilet is always breaking. He lugs a bucket into the backyard
and sits on it, sometimes for an hour.

The man next door's wife is cheating on him with a nun.
She enters in her garb, and minutes before the husband pulls up,
she trots out in jeans, and fires her motorcycle up the hill.

She is the only nun I've seen in years. I have not seen a wedding
in the church across the street, but many car accidents.
This is the only time I see the other neighbors.

Why didn't you open the last letters, the ones in which
your daughter writes she plans to pay you back,
and the lunch you would have had in the Winter Palace?

*Bless you mother, thank you for all of your help. I hope the storms did not break
the flower pots again and that the birds stop trapping themselves*

Poetry

on your porch. In Bali, they do not have a word for Artist. It is the same word as Human. Please take care of yourself.

Allison Eir Jenks