

Imaginary Ancestors: The Woman with Fabled Hair • Madeline DeFrees

In the life to come I unravel and let down
the extravagant bolt of hair,
the braids of a saint caught in silk
all the days I remember. Cut free of the tin box
the future crown is always mine. Repeated
shocks of auburn, shades of my mother's
upswept hair when she ran away
with the man who would fade to my father.

I am waiting for him to come again, the simple
man in elaborate disguise, wearing his
bones like a prophet. When enough time has been
lost, her hair will fall to my shoulder.
Dense folds released from the veil, this past
woman's glory recovered
brings back the forgotten blend, lilac and
amber, cypress and plum.

The man will look into my eyes when I come
for the girl in the glass, the one to be
lifted down from the wall where she hangs
in the white dress, the too-short curls. "We have
plenty of time," taking the girl's right hand.
"We have from now on," stroking the nails
she tried to press down, kissing them. He won't mind
that her teeth are set far apart,

believing that passionate sign. *Don't be afraid,*
and the brain in its time carries her
over the doorstep, engraved words to a bride.
These forevers that keep
disappearing, bureau drawers of a life
that threatens to move us out. The body
meets the animal it ran from: dark bush
parted in the night, wet fur, the cave lighted
by the eyes of lynx, my own
dense longing.