

Colette Inez

THE WIG OF LILIANE (4 RUE BROCHANT)

Chestnut-colored, it droops
like a tender animal curled
in a bottom drawer
of the foyer chiffonnier.

My new-found cousin, Maurice, retired
professor of Latin and Greek,
keeps everything she wore:
hats, coats, purses, furs.

In every packed room her photograph—
wide-apart eyes, level grey gaze,
neck-length hair later shaved,
the offending lump plucked from her brain.

In the wig, snug under a slouched hat,
she revives to rummage for books
in dusty stores, striking a bargain
with dealers.

A hard-to-find translation
for Maurice cheers her, defers
the nausea, headaches he soothes
with a cloth dipped in cologne.

In this near museum of bric-a-brac,
posed in a dark Parisian spring,
Maurice confides in me.
A finch perched on her funeral wreath and sang.

After the burial, a pigeon
from the Parc Batignolle stood guard
on his shoulder. And inside the kitchen,
having misread the light of an open window,

a sparrow circled her needlepoint
of birds and sky. We hear a stir
at the door. Flinging the wig to the floor,
she floats into the vestibule, breathless

with the purchase of *Martial's Epigrams*.
A scarce edition, leather-bound, deep brown,
like her damp hair, whose true shade
matches the hue of the antique buffet

looming in the mirrored hall.
The bird roosts in her outstretched palm.
As soon as she nudges it back on course,
she will cradle my face in her hands,

examine me as if I were another rare book
she'd stumbled on at the *bouquiniste*.
"Maurice, *chéri*, look, our cousin has something
of her mother's eyes about the lids, the lift

of the brow, but Aunt Jeanne's hair,
the flyaway curls.