

Robin Behn

UPON BEING ASKED MY OPINION ABOUT AN AUTOPSY

Wherever I am, now, I'm braced:
my mother or maybe my sister,
the daughter she'd call first,
announcing your release into the serum of bright light
your brain had begun to be bathed in in this life
—she will not say it that way.
No one, don't worry, will say it that way.

Nor how every Sunday of your unravaged life
you walked alone down three steps,
closed the door behind you and typed,
on and off, your one-note hymn
in which—forgive me, you never said what
should happen to the files—
a raven-haired woman
(even after you penciled in fake names
she didn't have my mother's name)
walked the streets of New York, her long legs flashing
in the web of tangled traffic as you tried to follow her . . .

Books call it *tangles* and *plaques*.
So it seems you got it right, the mind
the woman walked in. And, empty spaces surrounding
“densely shaped granules of unknown significance”
in the part, get this, named for its *seahorse* shape that's
memory's storehouse. Though no doubt you'd favor
the Greek *hippo/campus*—some fat, gray-faced new kid
you'd stick in the front row, extract
recitations from, including (he'd know it of course)
certain choice passages from *The Great Unpublished American Novel*—

Call me to task on that one.
Make me pay. Make me stay after school.
Make me feel what it's like after-hours.
How quiet quiet is, how hushed the hallowed halls,
who's sweeping up the bundles, recording
shrinkage, erasing *Mr.* from *Behn* and clapping
huge clouds of him against the brick building
till great, pocked, rectangular hoof marks mark
where something trapped stamps till the ground
goes white with the sound of its passing, almost passing,
but *something*, still pacing, majestic, heart-high:

I will not let them hunt you down after you've gone.
I will not let them break the binding,
I will not let them leaf through the brain,
I will not let them see our perfect mother
older now, and withered, and bound
to what's called *tracks*.