

Two Poems · *Rebecca Lilly*

THE FORTUNETELLER'S PARLOR

The murderer in the next cell drew your tarot—the ace of cups—one afternoon in the house of fortunes. A hand comes forth from a cloud holding a goblet with a fountain. Each spray falls like a pillar onto the water lilies below, where it mists into a puff of smoke from the cigarettes of our death row inmates. “No,” a boy murderer insists, drooling on the card, “those are strings cut from clouds they once held.” In the dim room of the fortuneteller, you can hear our friends estimate the buoyancy of air, trying to figure everything out. If this is where the riddle ends, then you, the observer, as if reflected through this mirror, are implicated, unless this dream, too, is cut to be a sapphire and placed on the ring of your enemy.

THE DIARY

“Hermits’ bodies are winged tattoos—there is little else one can know of them.” I found this entry in a diary of my kindergarten teacher who was wiser than her years. Back then, she told me to keep one too, lest my memories vanish in the void as my chest cavity swallows my heartbeat. “Thoughts hop like grasshoppers,” she said. “It’s a daily task, keeping track.” She fed hers each night to her birds suspended in a wrought-iron cage (“Otherwise they’re never safe,” she would say) over a dirt floor time swept like a dusty broom, shadow onto light onto shadow. There wasn’t much light in the warehouse where her prized birds fed. A man dressed in black suits would visit some weeks and offer his price for used items. His smile had a hint of promiscuity, as did his eel-like fingers; even little children could see it. It was mostly old people he secluded. There were notes in her diary, correspondences, marginal tidbits: his love of cheap things, his refusal to pay for even the smallest antique. He bought her diary too, in time, and at a very reasonable price, that little man of whom I haven’t heard since, dirtiest of the second-hand dealers.