

Jon Loomis

BALTHUS RETURNS

Clever, as marmots go. Piercing whistle,
delicate paws. Outside, the garden's

tunnelled, the lawn's hummocked and drilled.
When he tires of digging, he paints. All day,

all night the models clomp up and down the stairs
in their maryjanes—young girls, eyes glazed,

slack-jawed and stumbling. He paints them nude
or partly nude, legs fanned wide, heads lolling.

One day, soldiers round up all the giant rodents.
Safe in Switzerland, the marmot isn't gassed—

he burrows, paints his drugged adolescents
as if nothing has changed—his lost cat Mitsou

leering from every canvas, sprawled on a table,
perched on a ladderback chair. *Darling Boy*,

writes Rilke—the great poet, brought up
in ringlets, crisp little dresses. *Darling Boy*

how I've missed you. The marmot rolls his eyes,
balls the letter into the fire. Smooths his whiskers.

Turns to the slender twelve-year-old, supine
on the sofa. You are so lovely in this light

he says. Please, *alouette*, lift your skirt
just a little. Let me help you unbutton your blouse . . .