

Plesiosaurus Josephii

Brother, when you first took your trade, I would find you bent
 over a settee stripped to its burlap, your mouth knobbed
with nails, bringing order. How you would pull the new fabric over
 the horsehair, add another handful of shavings, tug
the muslin over each arm. One day you turned as you did
 when we were children, tacks still tight
between teeth. You widened your mouth like a monster's
 mouth and roared: a regular jagged-toothed terror!

With his craned neck and crazed grin, his jumble of teeth
 that jut like studs from his maw, the plesio-baby
should bear your name. But my orphan-lizard lies
 destined for some city buyer. A gentleman-scholar
will name my foundling-find. Not I.

Privately

I will recall him as I recall you: still mine.

Note:

These poems are about proto-paleontologist Mary Anning (1799-1847) of Lyme Regis, England. Impoverished for most of her life, Anning persisted in digging up and selling fossils to tourists who visited the shop she ran with her mother, Molly Anning, and to wealthier collectors and academics.

Type Specimen

of the gentleman-artist
of the female-fossilist

*ambition wedged in a wallet
affection misspent and misplaced*

of love letters
disguised as riddles

*what rattles
like a captive
button in a jar*

and riddles that feign
to be
field notes

a franc, a muscle, a wild-eyed monster

of a tool launched
in frustration
a chisel

that falls
from great
height, how
it spins hits
the water
in a silence
swallowed
by the jeering
riotous waves

like expectation

*amazed by
the silence*

as words are

of inspecting the sand for days

like one long day

of the day it washes
ashore in a tangle
of flotsam
as down
the strand
she struggles
no longer

salt-eaten and dull, without handle

*no longer having
any need of it.*

The Last Time We Quarreled

He said perhaps I appear so unschooled
in the feelings of my fellows
because I am more drawn to creatures not
my own kind, most particularly those
long dead, turned to stone. For want
of words, I stared at him, wondering
what part was true and what part was gravel
he threw like a boy taunts a cur, the boy
figuring some rock or other would hit
its mark.

He continued. I was a thicket
of brambles rooted to a cliff: thorny and distant.
Or a road, twisted and difficult. Difficult: one
of his complimentary terms. He told me
no man would find in me a paved path,
a more pleasing way. But then I—who have found
the fantastic at great cost—discovered
one last elusive beast. Before I turned
from him, I asked why one who is truly
a man should long for the easier
way? and why should I, who have finally
become myself, wish to be a weaker,
more convenient creature?