

R. Nemo Hill

Empty Sleeve

*Be secret and exult,
Because of all things known
That is most difficult.*

(W. B. Yeats, To A Friend Whose Work Has Come To Nothing)

1.

Her bed was large. It almost filled the room
and smelled of flowers never not in bloom.
A boy, I could not picture age asleep.
Old women's beds, I thought, were there to keep
the coats and hats arriving guests would shed.
We always tossed *ours* there—onto her bed.

They lay there, limp, above me, as I slid
beneath that old fourposter—where I'd hid
a cough drop, several pennies, and a stone.
Self-marooned, I longed to be alone,
to share a place with all that won't be found,
a place that taught me not to make a sound.

This room was dim, these shadows near narcotic;
their waxed wood lilac talcum proved hypnotic.
They drew me in that first time—in and down—
toward things so secret they lay underground.
They drew me back when I felt most unknown:
to my coughdrop, my three pennies, my blue stone.

A gap between the baseboard and the floor
proved sanctum's inner sanctum. I was sure

no broom could ever sweep them from their nest.
The coughdrop failed an unexpected test—
its sugary glaze, in time, tempted a mouse.
But we sold both stone and copper with the house.

2.

Along with youth, wane certain ceremonies—
but still, I have my chosen sanctuaries
for lost but not forgotten things. A drawer
for poems. A jar for doorless keys. And for
the flotsam of suburban walks near dawn,
for the doll's arm reaching from one dew-drenched lawn,

for the five plastic barrettes, the sparrow's bones,
and, yes, elected pennies, special stones—
a certain streetside shrub's become the shrine
of what, by disappearing, remains mine.
Some winters, empty-handed, passing by
I peer in through bare branches on the sly

to catch perhaps a glimpse of the old lover,
the bright blue pencil, the four leaf clover,
the scribbled grocery lists, page after page,
the teacup cracked, no handle, my spent rage.
Let others tally up the minor losses—
one day I'll toss, as well, the hand that tosses.

In silence, I'll rejoice while others grieve
for all that's hidden up my empty sleeve.

(for Mark Allinson)

Young Horse

Birtherd beside the road in a hail of wood chips,
adzed and sawn and chiseled from green hibiscus—
hewn the mane, then part of the twisted torso
 breasting the tree bole.

Silence as I pass—the suspended gesture,
lifted tools and eyes of distracted sculptors,
shirtless barefoot boys hard at work since daybreak,
 hair full of sawdust,

clinging calmly, each to his chosen station,
haunch or hoof or heart of the wood—each smiling
briefly, shyly. What's this I'll hear behind me
 neighing and pawing?

(Petulu, Bali—2003)