

Summer

by Anne Elezabeth Pluto

for my father

I want to memorize this
our time together — what we did
without her there to tell me
You wouldn't want this life
you're not cut out for it — and me
the child holding the reins of an unruly horse
as you took off its shoe and examined its foot
before putting the new one in place
for riding far away — from the dirt I had pulled carrots
shaped like mandrakes — or had stolen sour apples
that fell beneath the huge tree where yellow and green
caterpillars hung like earrings in the twilight — or sugar
I'd taken from the box in the pantry when she wasn't looking.
It was a fortune of smuggled goods
with which to win them over
to keep them still and nudging me for more
while you attended to their hooves.

She still tells me what to do
miraculously knows if I've lost something
she has given me — as I should only like
what she had — and I don't care — I take these
things — and wait for prescience to cover me
like a blanket — she misses you — and wants to die.
You are in every dream she has — they fill her up
to being young — and upon waking she reaches backwards
to you — left only with the bed half empty.

I'm dying to be honest

and sit her down to listen finally to me
to see me as I truly am — it's almost hopeless
and I cannot bear her cursing in three languages
for all the good it does her — it sends me into silence.
I've chartered the stars to find the constellation
of forgiveness — its open milky light inviting me forward
to resurrection — to love — to the familiar made over
against the odds of time and space.
I've memorized this, now, the young girl, her long hair
slipping from the braids — the mandrake carrot in her open
hand, the unruly horse tamed and looking at her
with trusting eyes and her blacksmith father
whispering in Russian,
Hold him — hold him tight.

