

Poems from Lowell House told between 3:24AM and 5:26

The Desperate Portrait of A Desk On Fire

I am the size of an eye,
but have held centuries.

My silver belly is bruised with light,
Pencil shavings, orange-white lamplight, a fingertip's grease.
I do not blink. They come
and I cradle them,
face after face.

her mouth chewing a fist of silence that
I have memorized
the way a jaw stiffens when regret rises,
how behind every smile
there's a door locked from the inside,
But opened by the lock-out key.

Every face that hovers over me
thinks they've arrived at something new.
They don't see: I am already full
of the almost-saids.

The desk is a landscape of landscapes,
etched not with pens,
but with the silence before writing.
They stare into me,
thinking of deserts, childhood fields,
a window once left open in Florence,
Praying they closed it.

Never writing, but they blink; they breathe
Sometimes they cry.
One boy mouthed "god" and looked away.
One woman wrote lists and articles instead of poems
about the Italian sea.

I reflect it all:
not what's said,
but what blooms behind the eyes
and dies before the page.

They come and go.
But I stay, keeping
each unchosen world,
each untouched line,
like pressed flowers beneath glass.

This desk has borne them all,
poets, dreamers, nearly-authors
and I, the smallest part of it,
hold the vastest archive:
the worlds never written.

when they leave,
their ghosts stay pressed to me—
each a landscape of longing,
lipstick smudged on glass.

vesperes

Three Red Bulls deep,
two forgotten coffees (one with a fly in it)
and still,
I have written exactly nothing.
but three versions of the sentence
“This landscape is vast,”
Have been deleted
each time with the force of God and caffeine.

I sit at The Desk (capital T, capital D)
Lowell House’s own literary altar.
Wooden. Three drawers.
A tangle of chargers writhes in one corner,
snakes, cables, past sins.
the ghost of someone’s last desperate thesis
lingers in the back-lit clipboard.
coffee rings mocks me
with the intimacy of someone else’s fingerprint.

On the wall,
photos of my friends beam with the cultish cheer
of people who’ve long escaped
this desk and this poem.
Their eyes say:
“Stop thinking so meta.
Go outside. Touch grass.
Write your damn landscape.
So you can get back on the phone, not worrying about assignments”

But how can I?
Every poet here before me
has already written about writing.
It’s all echo-chamber and elbow grease.
I’m expected to write about landscapes
while seated at the graveyard of 500 unwritten ones.

This desk is a crime scene.
A reliquary of half-finished thoughts,
sweaty ambition,
and that one time someone sobbed over Keats
because he “just got it, you know?”

And yet
between the grime, the ghost-coffee,
the overachieving lamp that hums like it resents me
there's something.

Something in the way the coffee stains still gleams
beneath the backlights,
as if it's trying to remember and coax out
what it once held.

I turn off the light,
Wondering how many people turned off the light before me,
Smile a little.

I think,
However begrudgingly,
this desk might be
the finest landscape I've ever failed to write.

Matins

it is quiet now.
holding its breath
like a lake before the oars,
everything still, everything waiting.

Light spills through the window
like someone meaning to say something
but thinking better of it.
It touches the wood,
this amber skin
where knots rise like closed mouths,
smooth with years.

A drawer ticks softly.
Cables coiling
The fan wisping the stack of papers up and down up and down

This desk has shape, weight,
a certain posture,
shoulders squared toward the morning,
hips set in the square of the floor.

It does not flinch
beneath my elbows.

There is a bend
where someone pressed too hard,
trying to force the truth
out of silence.
And still the desk said nothing,
only kept the shape.

There is rhythm here:
wooden breath,
lamp hum,
the hush before invention.

The sun rises a little higher,
The fan blades twitch faster
The desk stays perfectly, perfectly
Still.

Charlie boy

I looked at your desk the other day—

She's in the photo again—
the one in the corner with the half-smile,
chin tilted like she knows something
and maybe she does.
Why her? Why does she
get to watch you write?

The desk is too clean
for someone who only comes every other week.
Even your chargers are coiled like they've rehearsed.
And the flowers.
New, every time.
Twice a week like clockwork,
though time doesn't seem to pass much here.

Your trumpet's up there too,
propped like it's listening
for a cue that never comes.
I wonder if it ever plays anymore

or just sits, like the rest of us,
waiting for something worth saying.

I don't get the flowers.
Do other girls do this too?
Is it a female thing—
this care, this ritual, this softness
in a place meant for elbows and books?

You weren't there,
but it still felt like you were.
Like the desk knew you were coming
and had straightened itself out.

I didn't touch a thing.
But I left the photo exactly where it was,
her watching me,
me wondering if you ever let her blink.