August 2014

The Letter; Finding My Mother's Copy of Hart Crane

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The Letter

—for my father

This summer I found a letter of yours pressed in the book I was reading. I was afraid it would unfold our past: years I had pretended you were dead because you drank too much and didn’t work and I didn’t know where you lived when people asked. I was afraid that you might mar the morning with your absence.

In the letter you ask for me to write you, to read and love to read, to learn plants and birds by sight and all their names in Latin.

The print was faded and the words were soft and written for a child. They seemed as generous and kind as childhood could be, giving back what had been swept away. I pictured you by the ocean in your new house, waves breaking behind you as they must inevitably break, tossing up occasional “treasures,” which you sent me, objects with the edges worn smooth which I kept near but out of sight.
You were not there for me to tell you so I am writing this instead: I do love to read, and yes, I am learning how to name things: I call you "daddy" and I know that you have died.

Finding My Mother's Copy of Hart Crane

Even the handwriting speaks of her, Though it must be thirty years— The pencil, sharpened to precision Marking the grace found in tapestries and birds: Tight and delicate, as though beauty And pain were of the same vast labor.

Her angles on the page, like portraiture Precise as a code she might have learned At home; thin as fingers reaching for something We could not agree on. Like her shape bending To find a piece of glass a wound (underlined in pencil): silent as a mirror.