

Etruscan Girl

It is a moving thing
to see in this figure
how the maker
has shown the girl
or young woman
plaiting her hair
so that the arm and fingers
as they move,
the tress itself,
are one piece in the clay,
fused, that no part
of the model should crack
in the oven,
that no part of the moment
be lost.

Just two foot high—
It might have been
an image for her tomb:
but who knows that
or anything
about this girl
who has no name,
no story? Even
the tongue she spoke
is blocked, obscure:
dust upon dust,
twenty five centuries,
annulling
all memory.

And the figure half turns
to stare at me,
as though I
could give a name:
as though death did not
repeal identity,
as though there were
a body there,
a spirit that I must see,
clearly.

And I try to imagine
those who called
the craftsman in,
the maker,
saying to him:
*You knew you knew her well,
make her for us, make her
as we knew her in this life.*

And it was
as he had seen her last,
sitting outside the house,
debonair in the morning,
plaiting her hair in the sun,
the hands and fingers quickly
pushing in and out
so closely that
the moment and the movement
fused:
and the maker saw
that they were one.

In memoriam S. B. C.

PATRICK CULLINAN