

Shoe Beneath the Stairs

Time itself must have loosened the tread,
years of enough foot traffic hitting just the right spot
for that rusty nail's *pop* ping down the rest of the steps
to that old damp farmhouse cellar.
Lo & behold but a child's shoe is folded & tucked
in that revealed chamber where the wood has swung off.
Circa early 19th century, it's a child's leather button-up,
the sort which took a hook to fasten tight
round the ankle's delicate width.
This superstitious burying has been linked to heritage
far-flung as Brittany to East Anglia,
found in monasteries & churches, work houses & manor,
but with no empirical proof to explain what it's all about.
Fertility, most guess, as in *there was an old woman*
whose children spilled pell mell out of her house
which was a boot. Other archeologists theorize
of a spiritual midden
protecting against the troublesome
or more diabolical evil on the move
though here these words coming as if via Ouija
call forth the familial, name the shoe Aunt Anne's
taken to soon by scarlet fever at nineteen while her brother, my father,
ran as a frozen howl, his grief matching the wild rose brambles
tangling our farm's plentiful back hills. Think of lake willows
drinking the water deep under sandy mud to know the bottom
of such sorrow catfish sweep with their whiskers,
converting what ails to a nurturance only those
living in such currents know. Are the tragedies of our days
just news fodder from Reality TV compared to an age
where loss traveled by horse or mule? Oh saddlebag, oh satchel,
your interiors were the dusk bringing ducks to shore
as sure as that bible the heft of an elephant's foot
in which Aunt Anne's flower drawings - graphite, pastel -
were pressed to float forth before eyes & into hands
white-gloved and magical as a shop of lamps,
a home of lustres, the benevolent museum
of the Past's precious gas flues.