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Libraries, Love, and Plutarch

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Libraries, Love, and Plutarch

Melissa Morphew

Poetry

Third Place

Through dusty library halls I've crept, made
myself a home amid ancient volumes, always near a window.
I'd sit, smug in my silence, watching dramas unfold
outside the glass.

Brown leaves blowing in a cruel winter wind,
while I all warm, would glance up from
dear old Plutarch and his recounting of Roman lives.

I don't know when at first I noticed you,
walking home from work, briefcase in hand,
not minding the cold. But suddenly there you were,
encroaching upon my solitude,
flitting across my window-pane,
like a shadow cast on the wall of a cave.

Days passed and soon Plutarch was forgotten.
I'd sit, straining my ears for the first sound of footfall, then holding my breath,
frozen in time, I'd memorize each detail of your passing.
I knew the precise angle of your collar
held up against the wind, the way your hair blew back
to expose a high forehead, even the exact set of your mouth,
slightly jolly, questioning.

Then as always happens, you must have sensed my stare,
because you turned toward the window,
caught my passionate eyes, and gave me the sketchy smile
one gives to strangers in passing.
After that it wasn't the same.
Every day you would look toward my window,
repeating that smile with a strange kind of nervousness.

Yesterday I moved.
Now I sit in a corner where I can still see you pass,
but where I am once more invisible.
I saw you stop, searching for my face,
then puzzled, move on. Soon you will forget,
but I think it will be quite a long time
before I return to Plutarch. □