

An unexpected reunion (two at a funeral)

— and do you remember, little sister,
when you learned to count syllables in nursery rhymes,
like counting cards in blackjack,
becoming intimately familiar with patterns,
manipulating them in your favor?

Was it the same day you realized
the math didn't add up
on all those childhood fae
that left us gifts for our teeth,
our good behavior, our godliness?

Who told you to wise up?
It wasn't me.
I clung to adolescent nightmares
harder than I clung to you.
I'm sorry for that.

On second thought,
is that why you grew past me?
Innocence is a kind of violence,
a treasured monstrosity.
One I kept, and you left behind.

Did I ever pull you into traffic with me,
while chasing fairies
you insisted were mere refractions of sunlight?
Were you scared?
Did you hate me?

Do you hate me more now,
knowing I follow my own shadow,
for hours, completely alone?
I don't know if I've left you behind me,
or if you quietly made your own path, separate to mine.

I look in the mirror and see your face staring back.
Your disappointment has driven me
from shop windows and ponds and public bathrooms,
as I'm sure memories of me have driven you
from forests and caves and seas and adventure.

I'm not even certain you're here now,
or just a mirage I've conjured up to comfort myself.
Except you look worried for me.
But you've spent enough time in my world to know better,
and I've spent more than enough time in yours.

Enjoying a mild kind of madness,
a story that isn't a story,
a version of reality,
is not the same thing as being a child.
It is only the same thing as being childish.