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inspiration

Mai-Anh Tran

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*inspiration**—Mai-Anh Tran*

It takes a lot of hubris
 To dive into strangers' heads through ink and paper
 Digging up those last few tricky trickles of meaning
 (ceci n'est pas un font)
 To offer—on a silver platter, naturally—
 To your muse.

You need astonishing presumption
 To dare mimesis of another soul—
 Living or dead? Check it empirically;
 Great or pathetic? Slightly more difficult.
 That's what sorting
 (with greedy hunger)
 Through the ashes of someone's
 words will do
 To you.

Just don't forget to breathe down there
 Don't let yourself get pulled head-below
 There in the guttering fires
 That's what you get
 —the revenge of old dead thoughts—
 Who said you were allowed to be a phoenix?

October 9

Picture frame

Finally, we are alone.

I'm sorry for keeping you in that box for so long (I know how dark and lonely it must have been), but you have to understand that Mrs. Warden hates it when I leave, even if it's just to go down the street to the market. She's a very unreasonable landlady that way. If she knew it was me that stole her keys and made the hole in her fence, there's no telling what she would do to both of us!

But the important thing is that you're here in my room now, safe with me. When I saw you tucked away on the shelf behind the fruit stall and the peanut seller, I could almost feel your sadness. A filthy pile of torn scraps and secondhand toys is no place for a goddess. I even took the time to wrap you up in two pieces of old newspaper dated April 20, 1999 and held you like a delicate infant the entire walk home. I'd have tried to find a bigger box, but I had to get home before Mrs. Warden woke up. She's always disagreeable after a long sleep.

I think I'll place you high up on the wall facing north. Yes, just so. I'm sorry to defile you with my clumsy hands. I won't touch you again. Now you can see the rest of my room. I admit it has seen better days. The wallpaper has started to turn yellow and peel and my little bedtable has faded dreadfully in the sunlight. And