

Poetry

Andrea Witzke Slot

Standing near my Father's Work

Back home, in low evening's light, a window
frames my father's workspace. Outside, a pier
reaches out to coastal currents, shallow

currents that draw near, nearer to him, nearer
to me, as we lean beside a half-painted
canvas in an alcove arranged and cleared

for this untimed work – a room of his own paid
for with labour that kept a family dressed,
fed, sheltered. The years when clocks were obeyed.

But that is the past. At his painter's desk,
greying, more eye-to-eye, he talks of colours
mixed, his latest sketches and brushstroke shifts,

the advice and reviews of his teacher.
I touch a serrated edge where sea meets shore
then sky – and his translation – as my mother

calls to us again and again. We ignore
her even as her familiar song reminds
us of household needs, our daily chores.

But dinner awaits, and I cannot find
the words for all I want to say. I lack
the skills he's mastered. He's found new fire

in a quieter life, ignores ticking clocks
to claim this windowed space for hard-earned tasks –
of talking, painting, and slow beachside walks.

How do we know it's time? I quietly ask.
He answers, It's always time. Time to rail
against the rage of engines, time to tack

the waning hours, reach for the furled sails,
hoist them skyward. Time to belay, relax
your grip, release hand over hand. But I fail.

I shade my eyes and watch, putting my trust
in evening's coming winds, the coming-home
work of my father, his canvas, this brush.

Ali Pardoe

The Marketing of Beauty

The annual pilgrimage is underway:
devotees armed with umbrellas and cameras
forge their way across the road,
eyes fixed on the swathe of bluebells
clinging to the undulations of the land
in fragrant tyranny.
On the verge opposite,
a lone violet nestles beside a stump,
its delicate petals
lost in the shade.