

In the Lilly Library Reading Room

Christine Walde

you are not dead. The swift
strokes of your hand

come to life
on wings of blue air-mail paper,

ceaselessly flapping
in resurrection.

Between our conjoined pasts and this
present future I am both

a participant and witness to
the construction of your memory.

The noise, the noise, the noise!
I live on nothing but air

as I stand motionless
before the glass case where

your headless hock of hair lies
stationed beside the most miniature books

in the world. I am surprised
by the auburn colour of it — tied

with what, incredibly, appears to be
a simple cut of kitchen string.

Behind me, the shadow
of Lincoln's bust lurks on walls

of dark green silk
while seismic chandeliers hang suspended

over pages from a Gutenberg Bible.
Your voice will not get out of my head —

its insistent hammer of want and need, threaded
with hurt and hope — a threnody

obsessed with baby clothes, furniture, life insurance —
the routine of your domestic experience

a drama you were only too happy
to repeat, retelling different versions

of the reality you were living.
In the end, I couldn't read

your last letters — those few facts
when you seemed to survive

on ether, the throttle of that
sad fury. Your death the beginning of

a silence that, still, cannot be
described. Though here you are

arranged chronologically. Kept
under lock and key. Secure in the cool

climate-controlled stacks below Indiana
earth, awaiting the next visitation,

the next request to be read
in the Lilly Library Reading Room.