JILL NEIMARK

Rosary of Q-Tips

She's leaving my father, she says,
applying triple protection
hair color cream to her pubic hair.
Q-tips, one after another, dipped in a teacup of color.
Afternoon hush. She paints and then drops
each swab in the basket
like matchsticks burned gold.
Her bush a flushed buttery blonde.
If she knew, as she turned the beige blinds
to let in the late summer light, scrubbed her cup
emptied the etched iron basket
that she'd find him
dead in his bathtub at eighty-two
would she go on painting until
her lover buried his mouth in this gold?

In two years she'll remarry and my father
will call her each day to say
what's on his mind. Like praying
together, his deepest currents
balance a ballast only they share.

The rest of the box, true to tone, creamy shine
easy foam $5.59, is tossed. A coffer of qtips
returns to the shelf.
She looks at me, still
hugging my knees on her bed,
and offers a warning:
"I've noticed you're the kind

boys like to visit
not stay with."

There's leaving
and there's being left
don't they feel the same
on days like today
Oh blue and white box of reprise—
bunnytail puffs, hundreds and hundreds.
I've never usurped her. We are absolved.