

## She hasn't changed places

She looks no older than she did,  
A year ago, when I saw her last. Kept to herself, on view, she is  
Not so old as the Madonna, hewn from lime-wood—her joined hands restful.  
On a warm, late summer's day, the Gallery's shade  
Stalls: blandly air-conditioned; temperate.  
Swathed outward by reliquary, the Madonna  
Is alcoved, hands unmoved.

Eyes sever her bower. Charcoal walls, behind lime-wood's prayer, are grey.  
Arbored, in her bower, she must stay.

Footfalls away, in another room, Miss Susanna Gale  
Looks no older than she was, in 1763. She's still, at fourteen, waiting—  
Made here, a lady, within a portrait's chamber.

I'm tired, I tell myself—and know in my bones, that fixed  
Seasons have past me on moving, metal-shelved stairs;  
On glass ramps, opaquely frozen.

She hasn't changed places, at full-length. But then,  
The background's allotted—leafed as a stately garden, actual or dreamt.  
Whoever may carry her favour next the heart, she looks, herself,  
As if her likeness were set, to prevail.

She's in good company: un-fretful; genteel.  
Arrayed side by side, after a fashion, each singular pose  
Would—in any event—serve to  
Complement modes of reverberant elegance.

Brought to the threshold of Joshua Reynolds' studio,  
Did Susanna take him, at a glance or at a word's breadth,  
To plantations in Jamaica? An heiress, he's the artist—politely introduced.  
Nothing's tracked on a cheek, where the artist goes  
Ever so sparingly, with white-damped rouge.  
In her right hand, a rose is as pink as the folds of her dress. Petals won't fall,

while  
She's still, as she was.

Being young, had she seen herself run  
Into high gales of laughter, high seas of recoil,  
Before she stepped, watchful, into a dark-varnished mirror,  
And—since an appointment was over—out, again?

A year after last seeing her here, I can't know.  
In this late summer, she looks to a closer season. Her arched brows pre-empt  
Any discomposed surprise, at what may pass.

I'm tired, I tell myself. I glance back, moving away.  
The Madonna, alcoved against charcoal,  
Needs must stay.

CATHERINE STEWART