

## Alison Swan

### Catalogue

Look at me, standing  
flatfooted on library tile  
between card catalogue files  
and plate-glass windows  
turned mirror by night,

reflecting row upon row of  
little wooden drawers with  
tiny brass pulls and frames,  
holding wee paper labels  
marked, for instance, Aa-Ab.

Look at the beige linoleum,  
so highly polished it reflects  
every lettered label and  
my shadow self standing,  
flatfooted, imagining

I pull *Jude the Obscure* from  
my blue knapsack, tear out  
a page then fold it in half,  
in quarters, then eighths,  
each crease seeded with words.

Look at me looking at  
the card catalogue files,  
imagining I curl my index  
finger under one hook and  
pull a drawer open to

scores of thumbbed cards,  
every single one hole-punched  
and slipped onto a brass rod  
anchored to a drawer and  
joined with a book here,

under this same roof,  
because capable hands, with

their capable fingers, once  
held each book and typed  
an ink record onto paper.

This is how we indexed  
records of our knowledge.  
This is where we arranged it.  
And this is where he was walking  
and where I was walking, too,

brimming with unuttered  
words and hauling a knapsack  
heavy with papers and books  
through the corridor between  
cards and mirrors,

reflecting us standing there,  
where I'm thinking about  
flipping a drawer of cards  
forward and dropping one  
folded page into the space in back.

Look at me stopped, knowing  
the concrete planters outside  
the windows were growing  
shrubs simply from dirt and  
fountain water climbed the air.

I'm noticing this from far  
in the inscrutable future, because  
this is where I was walking  
and he was walking and  
she was walking and where

we all stopped together on  
the polished linoleum in  
front of the reflective glass  
and rows upon rows of  
card catalogue files where my

whole body relaxed into the  
same goddamned space he'd  
left it in over and over again,  
my heart really rather  
suddenly feeling like a

peony bud, my chest cavity  
too small to hold the blossom  
it would become, because they  
stopped too, his hands and  
fingers on her shoulders.

Look at us, standing next to  
the calling cards of countless  
books, packed into dark  
wooden boxes. The page from  
*Jude* almost left in the one

that happens to be the one  
that's never opened again,  
my fingers already preparing  
to stop a certain kind of  
touching forever alongside

an index of practically  
everything important that's  
already been read.

## The Ecology of Art

Adina was twelve when we lived in Cambridge.  
I think I saw her riding her bike in Inman Square.  
I think she liked the 1996 winter of so much snow  
and imagined a place with winter nights like ours,  
dark and wide-horized like her paintings  
I found in this magazine mailed from Boston.

I turn to those images now with a start of familiarity  
and think of her turning to the pages of her own copy,  
imagining someone like me in the snowed-under  
flatlands, someone admiring her paintings,  
their horizon lines studded with the silhouettes  
of houses, barns, trees, sliver of mailbox, fence;

someone remembering Cambridge, Mass., where  
the sides of buildings tower and crowd, so  
I learned to turn the edges of all the leaves  
of the Brahmin maples into horizons,  
one single tree an entire world onto itself,  
one black-and-white warbler an orbiting moon.