

The Conjurer Keeps House

She stands before the stove
and stirs the oats
for seven minutes in a simmering pot
while her mind designs
a quilt of rags
transformed from former lives
as clothes.
She thinks of snipping squares,
arranging hues, stacking layers,
sewing them just so.

Later she aligns loose seashells
in a jar,
fills bowls of stones with water,
brings them back to life
upon a beach
that never was.
How wide that place
would have to be to reach
the ends of earth
where each was found.



She tilts the watercolor
mountains
into balance
and almost feels the give
of Alaskan tundra
underfoot.
She floats with fairy buildings
sketched in pen and coffee
by an artist on a street
in Bratislava,
and breathes the scent
of stagnant sea from inked scenes
of Venice, long ago
her mother's, now hers.
Above the piano, a Paris street
hints in pastel tints
at memories nearly
half a century old.



She checks the gold she painted
on a scratched frame.
The color seems to suit
the rest and mends a mar.
Soon she'll hang the
temple dancers
in a place of honor
where their boneless
limbs will slither
in a frozen act of homage
to some distant pantheon.
Such deeds she does
with thoughtless moves,
at the surface of her being,
while far below,
in frothy fervor, she tends a vessel
of words as yet unwound.

—Mary Redman