

PHILATELY

You used to slip me tokens—
bookmarks, notes, and stamps,
an occasional dollar bill—
as you chuckled, fed me chocolate.
My first lessons of love.

Like you, I sorted the stamps in an album,
a gift from you,
mine small and red,
my brother's green and bigger,
yours black and the biggest,
as if our ages matched the span
of our collections.

No, between siblings, I was the more avid collector,
arranging the stamps by country, size, and color,
a plastic strip holding the patterns together,
all the while contemplating the mystery
of the land called "Norge."
What magical creatures existed there,
and how did this stamp reach the shores
of my grandfather's collection,
traveling eventually to mine?

In childhood, everything seems bigger.

The couch could have been a trampoline,

long curtains jungle vines

from which I would swing.

The same was with you.

I happily peered over the sink's ledge

watching you demonstrate

the art of removing stamps

from envelope paper.

My collection had too many of one stamp

and too few of another.

It didn't matter;

I didn't consult catalogs

or calculate the total worth.

What you gave me was enough.

Each stamp found its way into my collection

as if when housed in my album,

with the cover shut,

the stamps could assemble

and sort themselves.