

ABACUS

It was not meant to be
a good luck charm,
this abacus,
with its wooden beads.
Its rhythmic clacking was
a new sound to me,
a music from the past,
the calculations like
a telegraph
summoning a spirit.

I tricked an aunt,
saying I would borrow it
but intending to keep it forever.
I even tried to learn its ways,
the rhyme that tells its workings.
Alas, the patterns are lost on me.
Now, like the trinkets I find
from you, it is my inheritance.

How many things has this abacus counted?
Children, meals, all the days.

Countless bills.

Unable to calculate,

I tried to make it into a talisman,

carrying it on my travels,

unwrapping it at night

to marvel at the lacquered wood,

the roundness of the beads.

I thought it stood for

realized dreams, longevity,

the deep-rootedness

of family.

But an apparition keeps appearing,

a mist wafting through

neat wooden spokes and sections,

rattling the beads,

which shake like the last

of wind-blown leaves.

A ghostly vapor rises

into the air that I breathe.

How can I blame you for what

cannot be counted,

your singular focus on
the twitchings of your fingers,
the lattice of numbers
that seems fixed and serene
as the earth
beneath my feet?

And what can one do with a ghost
that cannot be banished?
Some say she is a curse
and that, in my firm possession,
the luster of the abacus
has vanished.

I disagree.

Now, forever the ouija's apprentice,
I listen to her speak.