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Set in Granjon by Bob Reitz.
Designed by Nathan Putens.

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For Dorothy Blackwell, who taught me to read.
Thanks to you I've always felt safe.

And for Wayne Ramsey, my luckiest break—
and the only person in the world who reads
poetry but doesn't write it.

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Which of you is literary, and
which one likes to dance?

NICHOLAS DELBANCO
What Remains

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A MIND LIKE THIS

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PICKLED HEADS: ST. PETERSBURG

For years they floated in adjacent jars,
    two heads on a dusty storage shelf,
abandoned in a back room of the palace:
    Mary Hamilton and Charles Mons.

We want to make things last. Salt, sugar, sun
    will work, and tannin from chestnut bark, and brains
spread on the skins that toted them, and sometimes
    words. But new two hundred years ago—

these "spirits of wine." (Fermenting's nature, but
    distilling's art.) Not all steam is water,
just as not all passion's love. Boil wine,
    catch what evaporates, trap that alcohol

and it preserves whatever you drop in,
    the head of your wife's lover, for example—
Peter ordered his queen to display it on her mantle—
    or your mistress, killed for infanticide.

They say Great Peter kissed the dead head's lips.
    The bodies sinned, the heads were saved. Don't be
distracted by stories of Joaquín Murrieta
    glaring in a jar in California.

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Though he was gunned down by someone named Love,
his problems were political, not erotic.
He really should remind you of Evita,
beautifully embalmed, better than Lenin,

then passed around, hot political potato,
hidden in attics, propped like a doll behind
a movie screen for weeks, deaths unfurling behind her
like a red scarf from Isadora's car.

And even if Jeremy Bentham's head was found
once in a luggage locker in Aberdeen,
once in the front quadrangle being used
as a football by medical students, he died

a natural death and landed in that cabinet,
stuffed, propped, dressed through his own will,
wax head on his shoulders, catastrophe in the drawer,
still convinced Utility was his goal.

The uses the dead are put to by the living.
Peter saved one for hatred, one for love,
and they outlasted hatred, love, and Peter
to become flip sides of Death's two-headed coin.

Heads win. Maybe the story
isn't the heads but Peter, unstoppable
monster consuming youth, a Minotaur
trapped in the labyrinth he built himself.

Finally Catherine freed them. After decades
she found them, observed how well their youth and beauty
were preserved, and had them buried, though no one says
whether bottled or free to stop being beautiful.

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LOUISE ERDRICH LEARNING OJIBIWEMOWIN

Two-thirds of Ojibiwemowin is verbs,
    and nouns aren't male and female, they're living or dead.
(She's learning the language so she'll get the jokes.)
    The word for stone, *asin*, is animate.

If nouns aren't male and female, but living or dead,
    what you think you know begins to shift.
Their word for stone, asin, is animate
    and that universe came from a conversation of stones.

Of course what you know will have to shift
    since every language has its limitations.
What's geology but a conversation of stones?
    and even we know flint does speak to steel.

But every language has its limitations:
    French doesn't really have a word for warm,
flint will only speak its sparks to steel,
    there's no word for privacy in Chinese.

French has only *tiede*, which means lukewarm.
    Can you have a concept without the word?
Certainly there's no privacy in China.
    So English added chutzpah, macho, chic,

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until we grasped the concept, owned the word
by borrowing it so long it felt like ours,
which takes chutzpah. Macho is learned, and chic
can't be taught, but both take a straight face—

borrow one until it feels like yours.
It's useful, too, for poker, tango, jokes,
all teachable skills improved by a straight face,
by knowing what will concentrate your power.

What improves your poem, tango, jokes—
she's learning the language so she'll get the jokes—
is knowing what will concentrate your power:
two-thirds of Ojibewemowin is verbs.

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