

Timorous: Polonius' Wife Describes Silver Birches

At dusk, your favorite time,
light catches him fingering
the heavy red drapes that shield his bulk,
stroking the senseless cat
as he waits: somewhere
along these cool halls, Hamlet confronts
a fevered mother. You pick lint
from his cape, only half-thinking
misspent youth, silk twisting
on a royal bed.

In his body's slow movement,
more pain than pleasure, air gasped
into his lungs,
removing something from the room.
Always things taken: Hamlet from his mother,
water diminishing the shoal.
Often she stands like this at sunset, admiring
the silver birches and thinking: how uncertain
everything is.

—*Helen Valenta*