

maternal excavation

trash nights, she was unstoppable at
curbside dig sites—
bag upon bag a layer to sift:
silver christmas trees, pool noodles,
filing cabinets with forgotten coupons inside.

you'll love me for this someday, she said,
hands brushing off grass & dirt,
like an archaeologist—
that's what I always wanted to be.

years later, my brother scoffed,
she raised you to love ruins,
because she is one, your mother.
Our mother, thanks.
—but maybe he's right.

i catalog her:
top stratum,
filled with recipe cards, bird brooches,
wedding photos where she's smiling.
below that,
garage strata,
wrapped wires (spares), quiet stereos,
side by side with vhs tapes
home video & Disney.

deeper still,
an autumn scent on floral scarves,
lap harp, butter dishes.
the bedrock isn't stable,
there are cracks.
life built up from a midden,
piles of the broken, the beloved.
i dig because she is buried there.

—Alicia Maskley