

# 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