

# White Silk, Winter Wedding, 1947

*“the substance of things hoped for,  
the evidence of things not seen”*

— Hebrews 1:11

The dress was white; its silk a gift  
wrapped in brown paper from her quiet bridegroom,  
then hand-sewn by her mother and her aunts as they sat  
in a house in Antwerp, their heads bent low over stitches  
invisible in the long afternoon light,  
stitching as they spoke to her of marriage.  
The belled sleeves, the skirt, the bodice blossomed  
like light through the prism of their talk.

But she had forgotten every word as she stood  
waiting behind her veil; knew nothing but the sleek  
whisk of silk against her arm, the faint  
sweet scent from wreaths of orange blossom.  
And so she stood waiting, until the unseen  
organist sent silver chords swooping.  
Then, drawing one last breath  
before this leap into nothing,  
she stepped forward.

The man at the end of the aisle turned  
and watched her descend, smooth and steady down the long  
carpet, watched her hover on her father's arm.  
He would never tell her when he closed his eyes  
he saw the Belgian night,

the pale eyes of an American pilot,  
who paused at the border between occupied  
Belgium and free France: *What can I give you—  
cigarettes? chocolate? I have money . . .*

“No,” he had said, “nothing, it is nothing.”  
Only at the last would he accept, and then  
only the pilot’s parachute.  
And she never knew, not for years.  
Not until she stood, small again  
and cold, in a funeral home,  
in a new land; and an unfamiliar veteran,  
come to pay his last respects, told her  
what her husband had not:  
that the silk of her dress had drifted  
from a shot-out aeroplane into the underground.  
That a man, blind in the night, had jumped,  
trusting himself to its fabric.

Suddenly chill at the altar, she only knew  
she needed every shade of faith  
to marry in winter, in a war-smitten city,  
dressed in the billows of a silken gown.

—MaryJan Gay Munger