

## Mudlarking

Crouching beside the River Thames  
blanketed in gray sky, metal boughs  
of Southward Bridge resonate with trains,  
underground like memories I can't shed.

I am grubbing through mud. If it were  
the Industrial Age in London, I would be  
seen as the rudderless woman I actually am.  
I'm not picking a pungent carcass for bones,

rope, nails, even coal to sell for a pittance.  
What was free now requires a permit from  
Port of London Authority I can afford.  
Tidal with foreshore accessible twice a day,

the Thames spits history, is a guardian—  
sometimes leaving her charges alone,  
sometimes exposed. There is rubble—  
oyster shells, cow femur, roof tiles from Rome,

blackened ones from the Great Fire of London,  
those unseated during the Blitz. I've found  
an amethyst, a gold coin, date worn away.  
Pins bobbing like tops could have held

a funeral shroud, diapered a baby, or  
been pinched between a dressmaker's lips.  
Repressing my PhD in Victorian lit, I try  
to blot convicts crammed on prison barges

for stealing bread to picture a couple  
parasol open, basket for a picnic, leaving  
a chipped plate behind. Secrets they held  
in their hearts might have been thrown

into this river's peaty water —a locket from  
a faithless lover, a knife, a battered ring—  
If only I could rid myself of sorrows,  
sink them for someone else to find.

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