

Object Lesson

By Claire Schwartz

You learn to recognize beauty by its frame.

In the gilded hall, in the gilded frame, her milky neck

extended as she peers over the drawn bath. A target,
a study, a lesson: she requires you

to be beautiful. You should save her, no matter the price.

No matter the price, the Collector will take it. His collection makes him

good, when he lends the woman's image
to the museum, where schoolchildren stand

before it, anointed with lessons in color and feeling. *Pay
attention*, the teacher scolds the fidgeter in back. *Bad*,

the child whose movement calls to her own beauty, the child
whose wails insist his mother is most beautiful of all. *Eyes this way*,

the teacher syrups. All that grows, rots. Good little stillnesses,
guardians-to-be. If you are good, one day

an embossed invitation will arrive at the door of the house
you own. You will sit next to the Collector, light

chattering along the chandeliers, your napkin shaped like a swan.
To protect your silk, you snap its neck with flourish. The blood, beautiful,

reddening your cheeks as you slip into the chair drawn just for you. *Sit*, the
chair says
to the patron. *Stand*, to the guard. The guard shifts on blistered feet. *She
loves you*,

she loves you not. The children pluck the daisy bald,
discard their little suns in the gutter.

Source: *Poetry* (December 2019)