**A Larcenous Streak Runs in My Family**

Nanny ripped candlesticks from the hearth of the Yankee Pedlar Inn, stuck them on her mantle. She hustled a crystal punchbowl through the front doors another night,

right past the maître d’. Never would say how. My mom’s a master too. Flatware. Small statuary. She slipped a platter into her purse at the rooftop café of le Pompidou

while asking directions of a Frenchman. I watched her do it.

Thievery slinks down my maternal line. “I’m liking the look of that butter dish,”

Mom murmurs out the side of her mouth, elbowing my eight-year-old.

We don’t just steal from strangers. Nanny once stood at the Smith Street sink,

elbow deep in Palmolive as her living room rug bobbed by the window, rolled over

Uncle Kenny’s shoulder. Boompa worked Hendey’s machine shop then.

With three girls to dress and feed, a good rug was no small thing.

But crying, in stitches at sneaky Kenny’s nerve, Nanny could only watch mute,

as her rug made its get-a-way up the drive.

In the years my mother and I didn’t speak, I broke in on Thursdays,

when I knew Jeanne, the woman who cleaned, would be in the house alone.

I slipped in while Jeanne vacuumed and acted like I still had a key.

I stole my mother’s earrings, her sweaters, two sizes too small for me,

but smelling of her, her perfume and breath.

I grabbed the 8X10 of my sister and me, posed on a tan carpeted Olin Mills step.

I purloined lawn furniture. Wheeling a metal table down the middle of the drive.

I wrestled it into the hatch of my Hyundai, drove it back to the city where it wouldn’t fit

on my porch so I stuck it in my cramped yard. I had no chairs then but set a pot of violets in its middle and watched it from my kitchen window.

Nine years later, when my mother and I reconvened over grandchildren

and what I thought was forgiveness, we were eager for reparations.

There were daily phone calls, books of pasted photographs, ginger trips

to a house on the shore. Mom wrote out the steps to Nanny’s apple crisp –

the kind with oats, for the ancestral rösti and the sour cream twists baked only

in mid-winter, lavish rewards.

We never spoke of what was stolen or of what is still missing.

That’s the code among us thieves.