

The Memorialist

All day he chisels endearments,
the names of strangers,

longs for the serpentine lines
of his native script.

When he first learned the strokes
of the Roman alphabet, his 'N's

were upside-down, his 'R's
mirror-images of proper 'R's;

his 'A's tilted to the left.
For months, he was assigned

to Budget Memorials—plaques
for the poor, laid flush

with the soil, guaranteed
to crack from frost-heave

after five years—
all the while, glad the turf

would soon swallow the stiff,
unbending capitals

he practised, but despised.
Now he has a house

with vinyl siding, an English
wife; he touches only rose,

dove-grey granite, or the premium-
grade marble of mausoleums, Greek

Revival crypts, tablets
at the feet of virgins

and Seraphim, adorns them
with flawless, lithoidal script.

But in dreams, his hands
betray his love

of other characters: serifs,
curves, sinuous tails

creep into his 'I's
and 'M's; he remembers

the glint of pyrite, feldspar, quartz
on his first wife's lips, the delicate

pallor of her skin, after he,
too impatient to bathe, covered her

with the dust
of every stone he touched.

Anne M. Kelly