

Berlin Zoo

In their loamy, half-lit habitat, the marmosets
snatch and pick at their food.

One tiny monkey cocks his head at me,
watches me watch him eat.

Grand Duchess Anastasia loved to come here,
even in the rain, her coat dripping
around her tiny ankles. It was 1922,
seventy years before DNA would prove her

a common Polish worker, not Russian royalty at all.
I grew up only blocks from her
after she moved to the States,
saw her once in the supermarket.

I was nine, going for milk and ice cream
with my father, and she was screeching
and shouting in the frozen food aisle,
swaddled in furs. By then she had over sixty cats,

left milk and tuna on the porch in the August swelter,
and then, when several died, phoned the cops
to report they'd been murdered with arsenic.
Once, when her station wagon broke down

an hour from home, she insisted the car
would have to be towed with her inside.
All the cops knew her. When the tests came back,
some said they knew she'd been a fraud,

knew she'd been faking intimacies
with the royal houses of Europe all along.
I don't think it was an act at all
when she held out her hand to be kissed by visitors,

or when she wandered to the zoo in her amnesiac drizzle,
stood so close to the glass to watch the tiniest
marmoset rolling in the dust, clutching his feet in glee,
that her breath fogged the glass.

I blink. One monkey gnaws the branch he's hanging from,
then scrambles down, lowers his head to his chest
and grooms his belly, as if to say,
Stand there if you'd like—I don't care who you are.