

## Coal and Glass

*Julia Margaret Cameron, 1870*

She lives among the silver salts,  
a nitrate pour, the sea's,  
where hoar-cliffs lift  
in rhythms, carry  
her sight to the ash-blond  
caul of the sun.

She flits between coal-house  
and glass: her dark-room  
and a frail-boned shell  
where snow-blind  
sitters bear  
her whims, her will.

Seven minutes to reveal the soul:  
*be still, my dears,*  
*be still!* She cups the rim,  
Dallmeyer's lens:  
the bright bay holds  
its crescent to the sea.

No: they will not elude her.  
Mary, May: her  
niece, her maid, their  
drapes arranged, their  
long hair brushed,  
waterfalls in suspension.

I'd seek her but she  
ebbs away, skirts rustling.  
Occluded in the coal-house,  
its reek of ether,  
collodion, where  
blackened plates brew ghosts.

She'll coax albumen,  
sensitised leaves.  
Skittering through time,  
how they brim  
with light. 'Beatrice',  
'The Angel', 'The Dream'.

**Lynne Wycherley**