

The New Criterion

Poems

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The old story

by [William Logan](#)

After the Blitz, her mother had begun an affair. So she said.
No one would have called her wellbred,

but she knew how to fill a low-cut dress,
had a fetching smile and a tongue for success.

He was a promising actor named Domenic,
or Paul—a Polish exile, perhaps. A few thick

letters survive, now water-stained and torn,
from the months after the baby was born.

They are his daughter's unhappy souvenirs.
Her mother lied through the later years,

when she would speak of him at all.
As a girl, R thought her father the dashing tall

naval commander whose picture her mother flashed
at Christmas. Oh, that bushy mustache!

(Merely a distant cousin, and not the smartest.)
Later, the old girl modeled for a few flamboyant artists,

coarser and more imperious as her figure spread,
a Borgia to her family before she was dead,

never betraying a secret or forgetting a slight.
Her whole life could be traced to those brief nights.

And the young actor, who trod the boards
at Sadler's Wells, swinging a fake sword?

History, that Chanel-clad thief, averts her eyes,
in cruelty, perhaps, but with the usual sighs.

William Logan's next book of poetry, *Strange Flesh* (Penguin), is due out in October.

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