

Dead President

Emily Lazar

"...so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat." —Theodore Roosevelt

I ask his favorite president at one A.M.,
although I know it's Roosevelt.

Because I've seen his boyhood bed and he
can pick apart my coughs and sobs and sighs
from others', we begin our talks like this.

He asks in whispers what's the bravest thing
I've never done. Getting married or
tattooed, I answer. Not so bad, he laughs.

In fact, he paid for needles dipped in
ochre ink to pierce between his shoulder blades
and form the face of Teddy Roosevelt.

But still no still-frames of us nestle in his wallet.
His future's strewn with plans like broken fences.
I talk in silver circles all around him,
but hero worship's where he feels the safest.

Who is this man who doesn't promise
a blessed thing aloud,
but inks himself a vow upon his skin?