Heart-shaped, the planchette shivers;
questions drift, a spray
of magnolia blooms. What lies
beyond the veil?

Blinds lift and flutter; the medium
trawls the shuttered
dark. The fiery abolitionist falls silent
at the pencil’s trek

across the page. Years from now,
Harriet will describe
her guide’s mind: serene, no prey
to the embellishments

of scholarship or French— the words
she hears ring
true. Like elixirs, messages spill forth
from the spirit

Harriet has admired—
Charlotte Brontë, London’s
sensation and unmasked authoress,
another so-called little woman

whose ink propels resistance
to masters who see
a world of women,
men, and children

to be crushed. The manacles
of mind and flesh
are, to some reviewers, coarse details
that mar fine prose,

better swept away. Ghost-talk
is all the rage
in this blood-stained land, a boon
for sisters, mothers
muzzled by recent griefs; but
  there is another source
of salvation Harriet has come
to seek—some glimpse

beyond life’s dark passage,
some sisterhood
of hand stretched forth
to meet kindred hand…

Charlotte’s not in heaven;
but from its antechamber
she expresses calm, the frailties
of life passing away. There are

other secrets to confide—Emily’s
skulking by the fire, storm
petrels looping by the tide; a husband’s gentle
hands…In the evening,

ravens launch to roost; the pencil
comes to pause.
What’s to doubt of this hereafter or that
Charlotte speaks

when her complaints
  against carping critics
pierce the dazzle
  of a tranquil afterlife?

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Quotes in the poem are from the following:

