

PORTRAIT OF DIDO ELIZABETH BELLE LINDSAY,  
FREE MULATTO, AND HER WHITE COUSIN, THE  
LADY ELIZABETH MURRAY, GREAT-NIECES OF  
WILLIAM MURRAY, FIRST EARL OF MANSFIELD  
AND LORD CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE KING'S BENCH

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c. 1779

Dido moves quickly—  
as from the Latin *anime*.

Breath or soul.  
Beside her, the generations-free kin,

a biscuit figurine in pink.  
Dido positioned in irony—

the lowest are taller here.  
Elizabeth should provide

an unkind contrast: pretty, blonde,  
pale in uncovered places—

but no.  
The painter worships the quickened Other.

Dido, his coquette of deep-dish  
dimples, his careless, bright love.

Forget History.  
She's a teenager.

We know what that means:  
cocky, stupid about reality.

No thought of babies—  
feathers in her arms.

She might wave them, clearing  
dead mothers from the air—

and she's special—  
her great-uncle dressed her with care,

hid her from triangles and seas  
outside this walled garden.

Let her be.  
Please.

No Dying Mythical  
Queen weaving a vivid, troubled skin—

but Dido, full of girlhood,  
and Elizabeth reaching

a hand. *Behave, cousin,*  
she begs.

*Don't run away from me.*