

Smart Girls Always Have a Plan

CARLA PANCIERA

If only my teachers had told me:
Math is movement trying to express itself.

If they had shown me the Incan *quipu*—
llama hair fanned out like a sun in kinesthetic base tens?

I'm listening. *Math*, after all, is one letter removed
from stories of the gods.

But those algorithmic days, I coveted cloud paths,
the thoughtless sweep of a janitor's broom.

If someone had mentioned Galileo
who believed the universe could only be read in shapes—

who said: we wander a dark labyrinth without these—
reading, I understood. Labyrinths.

Which brings me to Ariadne. Didn't everyone assume
it was impossible to get out of that thing alive?

Even the hero's faithless father prepared himself
for a namesake sea.

But Ariadne was like those high school calculus queens.
So many of us saw chickenscratch, a traitorous alphabet.

But those girls intuited north. And maybe, after all
her figuring, Ariadne was abandoned by her love.

Or maybe the other version is true:
that grief itself left the fatal sails unfurled.

This is why, of course, some people prefer mathematics.
They desire unicursal endings.

I prefer a world both art and science, full of possibilities
I might learn, one trail of longing, another of string.

