

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Beth Ruscio: Three Poems

Beth Ruscio · Wednesday, January 8th, 2020

Pacific Grove, California

Ladies Sketch Club on the Beach, 1890

To order light, dear sister
to wield a vest pocket clock

and boss around the day
is not considered women's work.

Yet, truly, I live on scrapes
of Prussian blue and Gamboge crimson

go through tubes and tubes
of bright lead white, the cruelest white

for foam and spray, an ocean
pinned down with my palette knife.

I'm under a raucous spell of light
and the sea swelling in me

the dried colors caked
under my fingernails, all the proof

I need. Let my smocks, neglected
yellow and gray, I don't care

only let me wait out
for the golden hour

see how it polishes even a crude thing
like my sweat to a flushed glamour.

It's not order, cleanliness

not our father's god I serve.

Behold my sin, like beach tar
whiskered blackly, in sand and burnt umber.

2nd place, Beyond Baroque Second Annual Poetry Contest

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Purgatoire, Nevada

Washday

No breeze sister dear

scrape one cake lye soap
into boiling water – turn my head

smoke drifts dust – what a desert
won't draw out of a body

once believed I'd see mama again

sort into piles – colors – britches
rags – monthlies

insides still tender

whites soak in bucking tub – set with salt
pour boiling from a height

through wood ash
through grime – tar – blood

scrub scrub – knuckles smart
fingers thorned – til I can't stand my own touch

for once let a stain just be

fetch fresh kettle of water – fresh
save the sweat dripping off my face

fresh got a mouth on me

fish out scalded whites – make do
in a pinch use a broomstick handle

rinse starch – bluing – pin sheets
out of sight hang rags

repeat after me child

make your bed in the morning
and the day starts

sorrow bleaches us

pour rinse water in flower beds
flowers know your worth

sing morning – sing weak from heat
the devil vanquished – an immaculate smock

*

Beside my self with

I'd killed off two, maybe three of my selves
stuffed them in the broom closet
why not the crawl space I wonder. Closets are the first places they look.

What it felt like to kill I don't remember except
in the bathroom with the cracked skylight
the roaches when I turned on the lamp to pee, the ants on the one cup
I didn't rinse before bed.

“^

Only merely slightly against live and let live, slightly
Buddhist fraud.

On the lam, I'm invisible in mirrored Ray-Bans

when the noir version
where even the camera wields a scalpel
framed for something you didn't do
lights up my smart phone like a conscience, see?

“^

Run into the actress playing me. Try to avoid her.
End up complimenting extravagantly.
She's so self-possessed. Knows about murders.
Her unruffled hippie chic, and underneath the floaty ruse—harsh as shit kicker boots.
Much better at this scene. More than one of me thinks, *Honey, you can have the part.*

“^

Hole up in Manhattan. Try to blend in. Which who lives in this cold water flat?
Up a steep and very narrow staircase. Interior decorated in paisley squalor.
Didn't Didi turn me on to this hide out?

I play shell-shocked, as happens in times like these
when words don't—spit it out . . . work.
Plus I've never been good with faces.

When I was who, what did I didn't do?
I must
belong here, don't I
keep coming back—I do. I do. Fuck. I do.
Eventually one feels assaulted by disguise.

(Author photo by Alexis Rhone Fancher)

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