Cultural Daily

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Beth Ruscio: "Of matchbooks, phone booths and the loss of Nickodells"

Beth Ruscio · Wednesday, November 21st, 2012

Beth Ruscio's work has been most recently published in *Malpais Review, Spillway, In Posse Review, Poetry Flash,* and *speechlessthemagazine*. Her poems won second place as well as runner-up in Beyond Baroque's Best Poem Contest last year and this year, her manuscript, *Raucous Spell Of Light*, was twice selected as a semi-finalist: for the Crab Orchard Series in Poetry First Book Award, as well as for The Perugia Press Prize.
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Of matchbooks, phone booths and the loss of Nickodells

In those days, when somebody famous

yanked open the bar's side door off Melrose,

spilling a rectangle of sunny rebuke

on us unknowns ripening

in Nickodells's night-for-day ambience,

we looked up without looking up

slitting our eyes to the light.

We were dark-clothed theater rats

rehearsing all hours in our black box "empty spaces"

on our wage-less farce, our German Expressionism,

all our daylight eaten, not-from-around-here-pale,

funhouse sweaty with thirst to burn,

but seated in a place like Nickodells

in old Hollywood, on the slightly seedy side

down from local television station K-Cal

and spooned by the back lot of Paramount Studios,

in the hierarchy of regulars, we had rank.

We wanted for nothing.

Nickodells, with a name like loose change,

where dream makers on martini lunches

and newscasters like Jerry “from the desert to the sea

to all of Southern California” Dunphy

could tuck into one of the bar’s red leather booths

and dine in the cocktail atmosphere,

where here’s-mud-in-your-eye nobodies

could have a completely appointed experience,

exchanging numbers inside midnight blue matchbooks

that boasted of air-conditioning,

a smoky topaz back-mirrored bar,

Caesar salads tossed tableside,

shoe-string potatoes salty hot,

dark wood, dark corners, fifteen different bourbons—

back when one-upping the famous

automatically conferred class,

when drinking in the daytime

was the mark of a vivid, lush life,

when you could pick up matchbooks

by the handful, next to the cigarette machine

on the way to the phone booth

acting like you had somebody who loved you

dying for a call.

This entry was posted on Wednesday, November 21st, 2012 at 8:33 pm and is filed under Poetry
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