

The plaster tub

Kat Scott

"I'm collecting my strength; one day I shall manage without her,
And she'll perish with emptiness then, and begin to miss me."

-Sylvia Plath "In Plaster"

Will I never get out? Is there only one of me here?
This outstretched pale body, it's enough now.
The alternate is certainly better, she is painted and clothed,
primped and teetering up to gently brush cheeks.
All day long I breathe through her noxious perfume,
her wires compress and lift, an automaton.
She is folded around me every morning,
and I was defeated, because who doesn't like a gift?

I didn't mind at first, the corners pressed and tucked away.
Taped closed with Revlon and adorned with vanity, over a vanity.
Every morning she woke me, minutes before the sun,
to reflect on my imperfections. What a keen eye, what artistry!
She noted my stumbling speech with fond amusement,
and prescribed me coffee and tequila _ my treatment.
She made sure I was never without, and I appreciated her.

I needed her. I wasn't in any condition to dismiss that.
Her smiles opened doors, her words slicked chintzy palms
while I became a receptacle for long nights gone awry.
Strays began showing up at our door: fed once, twice
and she lapped up the milk I put out, along with them.
Her rough spined tongue stripped flesh from fingers
not quite fleet enough, I had never felt so raw.

She wanted me to embrace them: the ones who shriek and yowl
from their trucks like they're in heat, latching bitter eyes
as they caress your ass. She thought we were a service.
And secretly I began to hate what lay under, so docile and ghastly.
The clamor of the bar became a call to arms, a gauntlet,
thrown forth with blood and pus streaking stiletto soles.
I couldn't walk for a week: she was so fierce, the Shoes so Red.

But my knees are knolly hills now, they flow down to fingerlands
and up an untamed valley. She wouldn't like it there:
Too much squirrelly brush, too few scabs for our efforts.
I had even forgotten how to breathe, always cut short
my chest provides the rhythm, though it did all along.
I sink down, until my nose crests the way an iceberg drifts—
hinting at the beast below.