

Echoes from the Waiting Place by Diana Tharp

Illusion of composure is abundant,
Here in the waiting place.
Renouncing discomfort
We steel ourselves with restraint.
Evasion of despair confounds propriety.
Leaving so much left unsaid.

With a kiss, I beseech her.
Eyes eclipsed under bony carapace.
Lashes snagging wizened flesh thwart progress.
Lids stutter open.
Blue irises afloat in sallow sclera
Offer profound congregation.
Words ferried on my breath,
A supplicant's epistle,
An offering:
"I love you."

Pasty,
Lips cling.
Secreted behind,
A pernicious plug of phlegm
Promises impediment to air.
Tendrils,
Cells sloughed from fragile tissue,
Form filaments.
Spanning the tiny gap between lips,
The sticky web stretching

Snaps.
"I love you, too." she whispers.

I am alone.
Marooned in this waiting place.
Swiftly, winds gather. Already,
The dunes of uncertainty shift under my feet.
My shoes, ill selected for the journey, lack the soul for this.
All exposed surfaces begin to sting as
Cyclones of sand re-contour my resolve, exposing doubt.

Savage desert marauders assail her,
Silver, lush curls incongruous and perverse,
Halo alabaster aspect.
"Skin like a baby's butt," we would tell her. She always blushed.
Flesh stretches taut over boney processes.

Sheets of translucent sinew chart her skull.
Mouth a toothless maw.
Profile, primal
Munch's "Scream"
A coffee cup on the second shelf of my kitchen cabinet.
Abandoned oases occupy orbits.
A dappled masquerade mask
Defines desolation.
Desert not to be traversed again.

Parched tendons contract.
Fingers spasm,
Curl and draw together
Perfectly configured. Readied to lift water from a cool stream.
The desert has stolen yet another part of her.

Sheets flap.
The wings of vultures.
Those in the know
Prospect for mottling
The harbinger.

Cool, wet terry cloth,
Lain across forehead,
Sizzles,
Heat radiates from her sheet draped body.
Thermals rising. Mirages grow from desert asphalt.

Assurances commence,
Here in the waiting place.
"She's heavily sedated, unconscious and incapable of feeling thirst."
If this be truth
It's lost on me.
For my legacy
Is these memories.

A mocking array
Moist pink sponges affixed to tightly wound paper sticks
Blossom obscenely
From a heavy bedside cup.
Lollipop placebos.
I touch the dampness to her lips.
She snatches, latches.
Like a baby to breast
Vigorously, she suckles!
Disconcerted by the depth of her yearning

I gently stroke her cheek.
The ravaged ball is relinquished.
“Water,” she murmurs.
Trust impeached. We are betrayed.

Faith, vanquished, dissolves in reality.
Non sequitur that her brain,
Decidedly more like an egg in a skillet than a computer,
Cannot perceive the difference!

We can't turn back now. Can we?
This...her final directive. She was fed up with life.
She wanted to die. She was ready. She wanted this

This desert fury has sullied my intention,
Leaving my flesh pitted and raw. Yet
Wounds heal quickly
Here in the waiting place.
They must.

Scabs form.
I will pick them off later.

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