Two Poems

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Chicago
Two Poems
By Lauren Coyne
time stopped in the airport terminal
just as I stepped in after you,
like a proper novice
after a master
(or so you claimed)
and when I turned around, I saw
a brush,
acrylic paints,
and a note that told me
*Paint the world anew.*
I took time to revel in the palette
of infinite choices
and colors once unseen
by human eyes.
then with smooth strokes I blended
unpolluted greens and blues
to shade Earth’s marbled sphere.
I stippled reds and browns
for higher, craggy mountains,
their peaks dabbed gray
with swirling storms.
I detailed with a white-tipped brush
the delicate strands of
spider webs,
wisps of smoke,
and veins of crisp leaves
curling like children’s fingers.
I did not age as I worked
nor did I grow hungry
or thirsty
or weary
or start to forget.
so I felt no guilt
when I painted the things
that were solely mine.
I painted Todd’s beard,
though it scratched me
when I nuzzled his cheek
and breathed in his spicy scent
that last time
when I kissed him
goodbye.
I painted Sam’s tattoo,
referencing a show I never watched,
the way it peeked from their sleeves
when they played piano
and the notes tapered off
like their texts back to me.
I painted Alyssa
with her beautiful nails,
pink-tipped on our anniversary
when she confessed her infidelity,
red on her wedding day
where I witnessed as a bridesmaid.
I painted it all
admired it
and cleaned up my brush
once my task was through.
and this morning when I left that terminal,
I paused, only briefly,
to wonder
are you proud of my technique?
you, self-proclaimed master,
my unwanted critic,
who disguised condescension
as a compliment.
are you proud
of how I took your lessons to heart
on how coated primer can cover mistakes
and unwanted accidents
no matter how big they are?
(or would you be,
if I hadn’t practiced, first,
on you?)
but then the thought,
and the memories of painting
and of the note
(and of you)
washed away like the water
used to clean my brush
down the sink.
2. Tsunami
The curtain is beautiful, and ancient, and cool to the touch
With its gradients of blues and greens
Edged in a gentle, foamy white.
The stage is sanded and the props set just so,
With chairs placed beneath umbrellas
With the coolers and balls in place
Easily accessible for the climax
Where you spike the ball
And toast your victory
With Coors.
But then you hear the overture begin to play, and
The roaring cheers from the gathered crowd.
You feel the noise in the soles of your feet
And your knees go weak
And you start to sway
And you see
The curtain
Rise.
You flee the set and don’t dare risk looking back,
So you miss your co-stars’ costume failures
As they lose their floppy hats,
And strappy sandals,
And the odd shoe.
You don’t stop, in your flight, to wonder about those fellow co-stars,
Or trying to salvage an expensive prop?
Or fleeing alongside you?
Or staying behind?
You’ll find out in tomorrow’s front-page headlines
And make a solemn vow to never, ever
Pursue a job in theatre again
Since your stage fright
Is so terrible.
And you’ll send off some quick emails
To concerned family and friends
And to the play’s director
And hope to God
It is enough
And that the director, his suit the darkest black,
His face, so grim and grinning,
Pale, and white
Like bones
Won’t come in person to persuade
Or try and call you back
Until you feel ready.
And you hope
You won’t.
Not for many years to come.