

Two Poems by Laura Stuckey

Laura Stuckey

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Instructions for a Woodcut Artist

The woman must carry a pail
in her ancient fingers;
then you will have a true garden scene.

Carve her in shallow stands of trees,
move her from one silence
to the next, among the other women

who have bent their bones low
seeking gifts from rich soil
among weeds that must not yet be pulled.

The time for evil's eradication
was not upon her. Yet the sun was high.
Render her slightly apart from shadow.

Was she ordinary? How do you know?
She was meek in her father's house,
that you can assume, a jewel

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schooled in the ways of comfort.
Imagine you are working
in porcelain. Feature the cheekbones

like delicate wings, see them
as blush with ivory stems.
Yet, it is true, you must also know

how the marriage bed changed her.
No pine or fir will do;
stratify her into the Pear,

wood of hardest grain. Use your fist knife
to burden her with curled foot
and no name of her own.

Ingrain the either-or of her world
inflexibly into her posture,
that of father or that of husband,

despite the drape of her garment
which flows like the dream of order
to emerge on your dry paper.

The Question

The question fails to dissolve. Morning's cold
behind the window doesn't let it hide
like poor Persephone's unraveled gold
hidden with blood beneath earth newly dyed.
It stands more firmly than winter's worn root,
it bears more weight than a century's soot:
how do you live above the heart's own ground
whether fertile or frozen, cut or wild?
The question plagues my senses all year round;
there comes no season when its threat falls mild,

because frail nerves regard the open plain
as torture—raging light that can't be feigned.
Yet must the question live in me at all?
I'd rather it quiver with wrens through trees,
or leaf through canvas well after the fall
or tuck its symptoms into bas-reliefs
once stacked according to a simple plan—
but wait—that was the broken fate of man.