

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Elya Braden: Three Poems

Elya Braden · Wednesday, August 19th, 2020

Overrun

My body was a highway interchange.

Father, brother, frat boy,
preacher's son.

All the "no's" I couldn't say like nickels,
dimes and quarters tossed
into the pockets of my tollbooth.

People say I look like my mother, but my father's nose
dominated my face until a doctor's
hammer and file erased daddy's grip.

But I can't scrape his freckles from my arms.
They lead me back to childhood—
an atlas of fingerprints rising from my skin.

My mother met a woman she thinks
is her half-sister, the legacy of her father's affair
when she was 11. 11, my age when my father

scored with his office confidant and co-worker,
when my parents threatened to divorce.
Infidelity—is it a gene passed down to me?

Alone at the beach, I dream of my former lover
kissing me in taxis, in his tiny two-seater, in my green convertible.
Moving forward, on a divided highway.

The blackberry vines overrun my garden.
They suckle from deep roots, choke my cool mint.
Their red hunger ripens to purple, bursts.

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How to Be Deposed

Apply two coats of waterproof mascara.
 Floss until it steadies your hands. Sit down
 while you sheath your winter legs
 in ultra-sheer pantyhose, Nude #2. Remember
 the time before your ninth deposition,
 teetering in your hallway in a twisted
 tree pose, you wrenched your back,
 flailing like a netted trout.
 Do not bat your eyelashes at your lover,
 I mean, lawyer, until you two are alone
 in a taxi fleeing the scene.
 Don't shriek when plaintiff's counsel
 accuses you of sleeping with
 the defendant. Try to forget
 that co-counsel's son carpools
 with your daughter. Count the lines
 in the wood grain of the
 conference room table. Hum
 in your head to the rat-a-tat
 of the stenographer's flying fingers.
 Breathe. Wait for your lawyer's objection.
 Later, when he asks: *Was it true?*
 don't slap him. Don't place a straight razor
 near your bubble bath. Leave
 your pearl-handled revolver at home,
 tucked under your monogrammed hankies.
 Remember you don't have a revolver...
 or hankies. Remember all the dimes
 you earned ironing your father's hankies.
 Try to forget his shadow in your doorway.
 Try to forget his hand over your mouth.
 Try to forget the sticky touch of your brother's
 beanbag chair on your bare thighs,
 your brother's threat: *I'll tell everyone what you did.*
 Try to forget his needling question:
Does it feel good when I touch you here?

*

Open House

They razed my childhood home, dug a dungeon
 for a dozen cars, paved over the plush green

frontage to plant a trio of pudgy cherubs, and ringed
the vast entryway with towering Corinthian pillars.

They demolished the green and white-trellised
garden room where we played backgammon and
gutted my mother's beloved flower beds to build
a dining room large enough to host a village.

They wiped out my yellow bedroom linked to my sister's,
but not my rage at her waking me on weekends,
pouncing on me, pinning my arms beneath
her skinny knees, tickling me past my screams.

They annihilated the mudroom with its reek
of turned earth and laundry, but not the memory
of my older brother, his hair frizzed around his face
like an antique gold halo, framed by a white door,
his voice, asking, no, telling me to come upstairs to his room.

They ravaged my parents' master suite, trashed
the velvet-flocked wallpaper, the his and her baths,
but I still hear the echoes of my father's: *You stupid bitch!*
and the slam of my mother's car door.

I wish I could have bulldozed it myself.

(Author photo by Bader Howar Photography)

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