

Three Poems by Patrice Vecchione

Bless

When I sneezed, the man sitting several rows
back—
the only other person in the theatre—it being a
weekday matinee,
said, “Bless,” not the customary, “Bless you.”
The previews had finished, but the movie hadn’t
begun.

His command knocked about inside me: “Bless.”
I’m not religious, exactly. But could he have been a
messenger?
Or was he just an unemployed, middle-aged guy
getting out
of the rain for a couple hours?

It felt a fitting command with war on the horizon,
ashamed of my country, the powerlessness
consuming me.
Not that I thought he’d chosen the right person for
the job.
But perhaps this small thing would be possible.

I don’t know how to bless, exactly. Maybe it’s close
to love.
And I can do that—love every little thing
in need of some invisible joy. No!
To hell with need. I’ll just take up love.

Conjure it for husbands and wives
and wife-beaters. Love for the young girls
who doubt their beauty, for the child who refuses
his dinner and the child without anything to eat.

Why not love the sky despite the fog on a summer
day?

How about the chef in his sauce-splattered apron,
the shoe salesman and his unbuckling? Impatience
and ambition?

Sure! My frustration and fear? Certainly.

Could this be the beginning of something?

Will hatred have to back up
an inch or two, stumble, then slink
behind the corner, shamefaced?

And in that absence might goodness step forward
in a wide skirt and scuffed shoes
and dance, commanding everyone's attention,
as we've always known love could?

Selling His Soul

*“A company linked to Yahoo! prevented a man
from selling his soul online.
The man is in his twenties, and lives outside
Shanghai. He offered to sell his soul to the highest
bidder on a Chinese auction site. He received 58
bids. But the company stopped the auction, saying if
the man wants to do this, he must first provide
written permission from a higher authority.”*

Had someone shuffled his days like cards?
Was it the endless rain? Did he just propose
to the girl
he no longer loved?

The world in crisis, had it finally and entirely
begun to dismantle him? Or has the death of his
father
threaten to undo him?

Midday at a quiet Shanghai intersection, the young
man
and the highest bidder stand facing each other,
unbuttoning their suit jackets.

After the seller pockets the cash, hoping to go
unnoticed by the occasional passerby, he and the
buyer press their chests together,
until sparks fly, an electric odor sings the air.

Vacant, before his cohort's very eyes, the forlorn
seller
vanishes to dust. His pocketed cash scatters,
drifting into the air.

The buyer stands alone, bereft, a bit shaky, in
possession
of what is not his, glancing left, then right—as any
man would
on any city street corner—before crossing,
now that the light has changed.

And On the Back Porch, Too

for A. B.

For three days she cried. In her new kitchen.
When hanging the just-unpacked curtains
above the picture window and while getting ready
for work.

She had a spoon in her hand or a button between
two fingers. Or she didn't.

She cried over dinner with her daughter,
on the phone with a girlfriend, while watering
the plants. Tears welled up when balancing
her checkbook and at night when sleep refused to
come.

Think of your own sorrow—how tears splatter and
fall,
how they burn. The face gets wet. One's eyes
become swollen
and red, making it difficult to appear presentable.
It's a partner-less dance that one leans into
and backs away from. Three days of it.

She cried at the red lights, surrounded by fellow
drivers,
while looking straight ahead or holding her face in
her hands,
trying to catch her breath. The car shook.
And she cried in the checkout line, setting down
a quart of milk, one cube of butter.

But I can't tell you her name. It might be your name.
It might be your sorrow. All that you have ever lost.

Patrice Vecchione is the author of *Writing and the Spiritual Life: Finding Your Voice by Looking Within* and a collection of poems *Territory of Wind*. Her new volume of poetry, *The Knot Untied*, is just out. For many years she's taught poetry and creative writing to children and adults through her program The Heart of the Word. Patrice's play, *A Woman's Life in Pieces*, was performed to full houses. Also a collage artist, her work has been featured on book jackets and can be found in the Monterey Museum of Art gift shop. More: www.patricevecchione.com.