

Kate Lutzner Book Review

Kate Lutzner's *Invitation to a Rescue* is an incandescent collection of poems that are marinated in suffering, disappointment, and heartache. Nevertheless, despite the various failures that confront the poet, there is a shining tenacity to carry on despite all the horrors that life so callously throws at one.

Failure abounds in this gorgeous debut, whether it is a party that falls apart in "This is How You Go About Failing", or the profoundly painful experience of a romantic relationship that ends in heartbreak and separation, which is explored in many of the poems. In "Destruction", for instance, Lutzner opens with one of her most robust images of a shattered relationship: "*There are so many ways I'm going to disappoint/ you, I tell my husband before we dissolve/ like an aspirin in water, a tooth in a glass/ of Coke.*" These vivid lines sear into one's consciousness; one can almost hear the aspirin or tooth hissing in its cup as it dissolves and see the confusion and anguish on the face of the offended husband. Accordingly, one is not surprised to read by the end that the poet is "...alone as a bird out of/ its flock". Loss isn't merely confined to a ruptured romantic relationship in Lutzner's poems, however. Throughout her collection one encounters a mother who is gravely ill and bed-ridden. In "Reduced", for example, the poet writes: "My mother, a bedsore blossoming/ on her leg, calls to tell me she saw/me in a dream." Lutzner craftily places blossoming after the bedsore, which may surprise the reader since it is a verb that is associated with life and vitality and not with an odious wound that is steadily growing. Much like the above quoted lines about the aspirin and tooth, these lines strike the reader with their

ferocity and dexterity and continue to echo later when one has set the book down.

Failure and loss are also connected to an attempt to have communion with God/the divine. The poem "A Sign, A Flower" states, "I could not help but say, obsessively, 'God, let/ me be a vessel of light for you-show me how to accept/love and how to love others.'" "Near Religion", the second to last poem of *Invitation to a Rescue*, confesses, "I want/ to go towards love, to surrender/ to whatever God there is, but I'm stuck/ here, on the red sofa, the dog/ tilted in my arms." Loving, or knowing, the divine seems to be just as challenging as loving others. It is much easier to remain on the couch with one's dog than to try and love and understand the Creator of the universe.

Nonetheless, the poet refuses to surrender to these formidable failures. The title, after all, is a call for a rescue, which implies that though the shit has hit the fan, these woeful days and nights are not everlasting. In "Noise Events", Lutzner writes that, "Out of failure, the river begins." Granted, the reader is not entirely sure what the river could be, but one suspects that she is referring to a renewal, some life-giving source that is bound to flow after the various misfortunes have passed and been processed. Further, Lutzner concedes in "Near Religion" that "It's not all failure, but a lot of it is...". And finally, the last poem, which is significantly titled "In Praise of Moving On", Lutzner writes, "Tell me when the traces of you/ are gone, when it is safe to know/myself again." Who will rescue the baleful voice that haunts these poems? Perhaps Lutzner is suggesting that only we can save ourselves, once we have been through hell and are forced to delve into ourselves to see what we are composed of. Lovers, family, and even the Divine cannot erase our sorrow. Finally, Lutzner's slim volume of poetry, which should be savored, shared and

celebrated, reminds this humble reviewer of Beckett's famous words: "You must go on. I can't go on. I'll go on."