

Michael Waters

Bonwit Teller

Who says the light doesn't breathe
or press its thumbprint of snow
upon this rouged cheek
mirrored in the store window?

We stare —
 this reflection and I —
as she brushes her frosted hair
with her fingers, without regard
for little winds that tease the ends.

Above the roofs, the roof of snow
slowly collapses, but never touches
this landscape, so tropical,
where three mannequins,
 almost nude
in the luminous, sand-strewn solitude,
 model bright bikinis —
stars wished above polished knees.

These familiar women also stare
into the fierce and artificial glare
of the yellow, foil sun —
while I pause among them, plump
ghost in a wet, woolen coat,
foolishly brushing my dampening hair.

Couldn't these sisters have prophesied
from their boiling cauldron of sun
what the future stores for flesh? —
how the various lights stress
each withering imperfection?

As a schoolgirl I stopped before this window,
 closed my eyes, and rocked upon my flats
 until the sidewalk seemed to undulate
 and I grew dizzy with despair.

Will the change come? I sighed,
 wanting to blossom into the sleek
 skins, glossy thighs, impossible waists,
 bracelets and silver fox capes
 that pronounced each flake of light.

Even their lashes were lovely, spidering
 eyes opened forever in the stunned,
 violet gaze of the paralyzed.

Will the change come soon?
 Theirs was a perfect, breathless world.
 The city could not touch them.

And I? — I stamp my galoshes for warmth,
 embarrassed for the woman of snow
 embarrassed now among them.
 Their world remains, and remains
 more eloquent than mine.

I realize the lateness of the hour, realize . . .
 the buses will not run on time.

Only the glittering, gypsy taxis
 like scarabs along the avenue,
 the rows of traffic lights
 shuttering — yellow,
 now red, now green —
 a universe of diminishing suns,
 and the million, heaving snowflakes
 light my skin
 as if transforming me

Will the change come?
 into a speechless mannequin.