

THE NEW TROPIC

August 16, 2023

An aubade is a song or poem about lovers separating at dawn, but with *Aubade, South Beach*, poet Catherine Esposito Prescott presents the reader with the beloved as place, our very own South Beach. As seen through the eyes of a mother who combs the shore for trash week after week, hers is an ocean so dear even its refuse is examined and handled with reverence. And while this could very well be an exemplary ecopoem for its focus on the manmade cause of the ocean's distress, at its core, this is a poem that captures the ebb and flow of love—the discovery, the clear-eyed assessment, the acceptance, and the letting go. (*Caridad Moro-Gronlier*)

Aubade, South Beach
by Catherine Esposito Prescott

The beach carries scattered remains of the night—
a bedsheet, a beach blanket etched in sand. The shore
quivers with discarded cigarette butts, ash
of weed, ash of tobacco, a soup of bottles—
mostly plastic, some glass—water, beer, champagne,
more than one condom—crumpled, disheveled,
used or not. I walk lifting each item as artifact,
I struggle to shelve judgment and my instinct
to churn each into myth. Orbs of sunlight reveal
chicken bones, fish skeletons, the chipped half shell
of a mussel, one ghost crab leg. We combed
the beach one year, throwing larger refuse
into large trash bags, then sifting through sand
for hidden debris the way we knew how to as mothers—
grain by grain, as we'd parted our children's hair
many times that year lifting nits and eggs
from soft threads, from hair which had not yet
known gel and dye. That day my son found
a lucky seed from Cuba via Africa, one that holds
the evil eye at bay, all who would cause him harm,
and a rosary made of brown crystals, each bead intact,
with a Christ, sullen, surrendered, spinning.

The ocean washes up more than memory.
What is held by sand travels into the ocean's body
and returns not as waste, not as sacrament. I would
not let him throw them out. How could I?
He was too young to know faith,
he who had never needed to pray.

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