

The Judgment of Venus and David

by Natalie McNabb

His whisper—

“This is strange.”

—is so ardent that I believe him, and hers—

“Yes.”

—is the same.

“We just grew apart.”

—Cliché, but the only explanation available to him—

She nods.

—or her. Neither, though, realizes their error. Their exchange proves otherwise. But for their intimacy, they could never let each other go as if nothing—

“It’s the only way I can...”

—and yet everything—

“...be happy?”

—depended upon it. Their last sentence falls like a butterfly fading on wind, fluttering once more before it falls and fractures, its pieces tumbling across the earth, finding their own ends.

Amidst what would otherwise be tragedy, the couple exudes the *ess*, the artist’s curved line and point where motion changes direction, redefines itself, traps the eye. It is in the way they step about one another and choose their words, always mindful.

The judge calls them forward—

“Do you swear to tell the truth...”

—with me, and I express their wishes. The judge asks questions he’s asked of so many before, but he pauses, looks over his glasses as if I could’ve saved them, spared him. He signs the documents, declares them divorced.

The next pair is called.

We exit.

Before the doors behind me have even closed they’ve each shaken my hand and walked away.

She drinks from the fountain nearby.

He’s out the revolving door.

Air wafts up from behind me, moves around and past, and the new silence tells me the door is now closed. Tomorrow I think I’ll drive that meandering road, find a spot along the river near the barn with the falling spine where, fly rod in hand, I will wade out to cast about in quiet waters and try to understand this Venus, this David.

~ Backhand Stories, June 2011