Smoke for Divinity, You

Gill Ritchie

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I embarked on my first diet ever. I downloaded MyFitnessPal. I counted calories. I counted mouthfuls. I counted teaspoons and tablespoons and cups. As the calories went down, so did the scale, and I started to feel lighter. I rubbed my hands over legs that became slimmer, over collarbones that appeared, over the ribs that stuck out.

When calorie counting failed me a year later, I felt angry that I couldn’t just starve. Calories of food lingered in my head; it was too dangerous to just eat a 70-calorie egg. Better to just not eat at all. Then I wouldn’t have to count it. My body begged for food. I tried to restrict even more.

I knew how to make myself feel better. My fingers became red pens, my eyes laser-focused on my deformities. My legs morphed into some hideous extension of me, my fingers the merciless probe that deemed life was not worth living with them as is. They scoured every bump, every flabby hold, every cellulite dimple and my nails wrote red lines of failure on my skin like an author editing his book. No. Not good enough. Fat, lumbering legs. Stupid, stupid, stupid. Weak. On my collarbones they wrote, not sharp enough, not hollow enough, not deep enough. On my stomach they critiqued, too bulky, must trim, get to the muscle underneath. On themselves they scratched, where are the tendons, where are the hollows, where is the emotion? I felt nothing for my reflection; I hated her.

My sophomore year, my urges broke free and I spiraled into binging and purging. Yet my eating disorder wasn’t about control... but it was. It was about feeling better. It was about feeling okay in my body. Feeling okay with how I appeared to the world. In February 2018, I woke up with my head in the trash can and my sick slipping down the sides and my eyes bulging and my face hot and sweaty to realize that half-hearted efforts to recover just weren’t doing it. So, I thought, I could throw up now. Was I a true bulimic yet? Would this make me feel better? All of this was to make me feel better... So why didn’t I?

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POETRY

SMOKE FOR DIVINITY, YOU
Gill Ritchie

It’s about talking about Hell—a layered shame, insolence karmic inflation, swelling, heat. circles in the desert

It’s about seeking Heaven like there are no words, chasing salvation of Other and others. chasing the dark corners of the mind

L-ve means discernment means I pick It, You in the end—in the every time people are company and good company is good thoughts and one thought and many and L-ve and I say to You, what a heart-wrenching surprise. what a fucking astonishing universe.

the more we ask, the more we receive, always I choose Truth, a salve for open wounds.

the ghosts of our holy men kneeling in a pew covered in blood and white linens, no repose we ask to suffer with Christ, hands outstretched—it feels good to suffer “we are sinners”

G-d only knows the shame of holiness,

far too easy to find that Hell can be comfortable.

—church, relaying something we know almost nothing about and we read like a book and there is still good in the world I fucking know it.

Coherence. two sides of a coin

the L-ve you give in the dark is the L-ve you’ll be reckoned with