

The French Lady

Five years later I still remember the French lady
and the smell of pink nylon.
She would have been a fairy too when she was little,
dancing in pink on tippy-toes.
We could have clapped her then
encouraging more.
Instead, we drop our eyes
pretending she's not there, not real,
not really one of us.
Sometimes we glance sideways and
share a knowledge that only the French lady
does not know.
Or, that's what we thought.

She smokes my cigarettes
(grabbing them straight from my mouth)
and smiles.
I smile back and awkwardly place myself
between my visitor and the grabbing hand
glancing down at my own fat and bandaged wrists.
I am scared.

At night she clambers into bed. My bed.
I get up then feeling ashamed.
She's taken my purse and my money has been hidden
in strange hiding spots and down the air conditioning flue.
Someone finds my silver ring stuffed up the plumbing
in the bathroom.
The French lady smiles.
I smile back thinking I know her better now.

It takes four of them to protect me and my things.
They grab her and I can feel them.
Eight hands pulling at me -
holding me down now and my nightie is ripped off my shoulders
as I keep struggling for a while...
and then...
- undignified, naked, defeated I find myself lying
bewildered on the hospital floor.

They take her away and I am left feeling grotesque.