

Poem in Your Pocket Day; April 29th, 2021

Bar at the Folies-Bergère

It starts with the scent of lavender as she
buttons clean pantaloons, laces up stays,
smooths her bodice and shakes out the frills,
ties the black ribbon about her neck.
Her costume smells, as they all do: mingled
sweat and makeup, the fabric itself,
splashed, perhaps, with the licorice twist of absinthe.
Then come powder and rouge, the small earrings,
a pink and white corsage already starting
to droop. Her props are placed on view: beer bottles,
champagne, a vase containing two pale roses,
cut glass bowl of oranges that may
or may not indicate a certain kind
of availability. Leaning against
the marble bar, she doesn't look at you
(Why should she look at you? Can you give her
what she needs, or even cab fare home?):
posing, perhaps, or perhaps beyond posing,
her face bleak, artificially rosy amid
the moon-pale globes and crystals shimmering
in the ersatz heaven of the cabaret.
Perhaps a man inspects her in the glass,
perhaps he's looking past; neither of them
seems to see the woman on the trapeze,
feet squeezed into ankle boots of lizard green.
Later, she observes his red-gold lashes,
watches his still-young face slacken in sleep,
breathes in his scent of cigars, cheap brandy,
scent that clings to her fingers like orange oil
as she works her nails beneath the skin,
methodically stripping the pith to find
whatever's left of the fruit's sweet flesh.



Alan Squire Publishing

Poem by Katherine E.
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from *Woman Drinking
Absinthe*
(2021)

