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Helen Tzagoloff

La Spinaria in Gossart's *A Women's Bath*

Free of corsets, hose, heavy velvet,
with not even a ring on a finger, they take a break
from chores, children, men. They're not in pairs,
not chatting. Each breathes in her own space.

In the center a woman combs her dense hair.
Next to her sits another in a shallow tub,
hand on pubis, perhaps fingercombing out
sluggish lice or, as a historian suggested,
sapphically pleasuring herself.

A woman with the legs of Hercules reclines in a corner,
chin improbably resting on a breast.
(What is the artist saying, depicting breasts

the size of Valencia oranges, none droop
as if sprouting up from the armpits?) A tall woman
reaches up to the ceiling, maybe adjusting
the incoming steam. Another with a short neck
and powerful shoulders leans on the windowsill,
looking out of the window.

Poised for a step, a petite woman
scratches under her arm. She has no waistline
and a pendulous stomach—she may be pregnant.
On the bench a woman with one breast
larger than the other is on the verge of taking a nap.

All but one are enjoying the warmth and the quiet.
A young woman, a teenager, is in pain.
She bends over her right leg, trying to extract a thorn
from the bottom of her foot. Her back is clothed
with a bit of cloth. No pubic hair or breasts.
She is the *Spinario*, female version,
the Hellenistic sculpture of a boy with a thorn,
much copied by sculptors and painters, but Gossart
goes a step further and makes *Spinario Spinaria*,
a human Diana not confined to the inside of a house,
one who runs barefoot outside, plays ball, shoots arrows.
Surely the bathing women will soon give up
their isolation and help her with the painful thorn.

Helen Tzagoloff's work has appeared in *Barrow Street*, *Poetry East*, *Poet Lore*,
Interpoezia, *Slant Poetry Journal*, and elsewhere, including both journals and anthologies.
She is a past winner of the Icarus Literary Contest and author of the poetry collection,
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