

Patricia Waters

Bathsheba

Rembrandt, The Louvre

She is holding David's letter,
having read it,
the sad knowledge, there
on her face, how it will all play out.
And her stillness, her foot
in the maidservant's hands,
what she knows about this flesh, this body,
the blindness it creates,
we are called to her inward seeing,
so we behold her as David may have —
the sumptuous bed looming, all background
— intimate, ordinary, carnal,
we reading her as she has read David's letter
for as your hand gives her soul-suffused flesh to us,
we are there with this Bathsheba,
seeing with her eyes
while they are looking at nothing,
not even at the words written to her,
the letter irrelevant now —
She is become a study in pity, in resignation,
in forgiveness,
fixed by those words that will define her,
we become her
in the moment she dies to herself,
in the moment she drowns in her history.