

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/1

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A NIGHT IN HARLEM

Darkness dives upon Harlem,
tearing off the moon from the knife-edged snow
splinters of gold bleed the ground,
and smear the lidded heads of thick human throng.
Set bay windows stack in symmetry under the
shop awnings,
chalky flakes blur the cut-out frames,
glowing of scavenged light.
Tonight, the moon hitches on the back of sleep,
snagging flying notes ping-pong over from
the nearby Paris Blues' bar,
where a drove of patrons loiter on pulverized sidewalk,
a ghost of mist snake round their scuffed boots,
as yellow cabs scurry upon potholed street, spewing an ocean
of acid rain.
A short-skirted dame tumbles out of a dark limousine
with spinning wheels by the loading dock,
a textile cloud of laurel green, champagne pink and licorice black,
struts up the steps,
trailing of perfume and sable fur.
Patting her puffed up hair,
tossing a hello at the bouncer there,
she digs through her long-strap purse for a pack
of Lucky Strike.

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Cold air slaps wild and hard,
she lurches to cordon off the blast with her cupped fingers over
the cigarette, and the others flick fast on the flint wheel
it sputters then jolts to life in curious
states, part wind, part snow, part pitfall
the slim butt passes from stained lips
into deep smoky drags
entering, exiting,
then settling like a goodbye kiss.
She draws in the burned foliage of the evening,
tasting stale breath and hollow New York's moon.

UPTURNED HAND

I see my upturned hand in the fog.
Familiar.
Yet distantly.
A hair's-breadth in reach I can almost
sense its tender protest
as the bones unfurl then draw close.
The same winged fingertips,
where the stirred shadows
pulse inside an outstretched palm,
laying peel like artful laceration.
A yellowed leaf falls to the ground,
and how my hand swiftly turns
upside down
in the smoky light,
tracing its gold edge,
leaving a marking of whispered skin.
When it grows dim, I stand still,
watching,
hand to be unfurled,
and pressed flat against my goose-
pimpled leg,
sensing a spilling breath
from within the marbled veins.

THE HOUSE OF WRINKLED BONES

Outside, the air is crisp with wrinkled bones,
while the violet hours
slowly discard its poorly dressed skin
over the starved body
before slinking atop the frosty ground;
when the crescent moon
slopes saffron rays upon a lone woman
in a house gnarls of bordered evergreens.
Inside, long, white drapes
sweep the brown-carpeted floor,
as she sits by a squeaky window with its chipping paint
worn down from years of famished termites and rotting rain,
waiting there,
reeling in her foamed suspension
for the visiting ghost to
roll out of its pockmarked void at the chimes
of midnight bells.
Dung smoke knits the sleeping cold a wisp of pale sweater,
slightly puckered where the skirting tears,
when it lurks beneath the gold-crocheted chair,
that is wrought with ivory roses and cat's eye stitch
the woman stirs.
Eyes shift, nose sniffs the flowing scent, tongue darts
to taste the turning air
then she leans out,
with clawed whisper of
cold fingertips,
reaches over to stroke
the low-hanging stumps,
smooths back the sloppy curls of its silvered mane
grasps the unfurled hands
and sways against the caressed notes of
a carved out mandolin.