

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/3

Joanne Corey

(Not) the aunt I remember

Raised in New England austerity,
bound by strict Baptist convention,
she became an executive secretary
in a trim tweed suit, efficiently
preparing her husband's meals
in a pressure cooker.

Now, she wears a cherry-red blouse
with ruffled cuffs and a floppy bow,
colors placemats that brighten
the unit's dining room,
smiles at strangers in the hall,
cradles a baby doll, memento
of the daughter and grandchild
she does not remember she never had.

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Fifty-four

We were the October Babes,
You from 1950,
Me from 1960.

On your fifty-fourth birthday,
You managed coffee ice cream with hot fudge
Despite the metastases in your neck.

On my fifty-fourth birthday,
I raise a solo toast with your favorite Coke-with-a-lemon-wedge
To the October Babes being fifty-four together.

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Downy

After visiting the suet feeder,
the woodpecker careens into the kitchen window,
hitting hard,
leaving down clinging to the glass.

Fearing neighborhood cats,
we hold vigil.
Wings splayed,
she jerks her head
right - right - right
left - left - left
beak wide open.

As minutes pass, her beak closes;
she controls the turn of her head,
tucks her left wing back to her body,
then the right,
smoothing the disturbed feathers on her back.

She regains her feet,
swoops in three slightly skewed arcs,
perches in the safety of the backyard maple,
leaving the delicate outline
of wings, tail feathers, body,
imprinted in the snow.