

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/3

Malia Bradshaw
That Street

I went down once-
insect repellent & diarrhea
pills- "That's where there's cock
on Sundays" our guide said. Rooster
fights at Club Gallistico.

Next to Cafetería os ños
the number 91 spray painted
on the adobe shack with rippled
tin as windows. Rippled tin
as roofs on houses, stapled
& swaying like an unsteady
hand. The children threaten
to beat each other with sticks.

The dog stands by the chain-link
fence as if guarding the scraps
of cloth draped over spikes. Bones
protrude. But we've made it
to the watering hole where children
jump naked & the lush forest
doesn't mind

if you get bit or shit or need to lose
ten pounds. if you're broke or broken
out. if there's nothing or something
waiting for you at home or if he left
you in a bar at midnight. So I undress
to jump naked in a watering hole
I can't see the bottom of-
flailing these limbs
made of tin & cock & starving dogs.

Cabarate, Dominican Republic.

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What Must Have Been Said

There was that December I learned to say *no*
in 36 languages. Just in case. Or maybe, always because.
Because I could tell you *yes* without even speaking:
the invitation apparent, where? In my widened eyes perhaps.
In the clenching of my legs. I must have said *yes*
even as *don't* trickled from my lips. I must have said *go ahead*
even as my hands hit your shoulders. I told myself you didn't
hear me. Surely, you didn't feel me.

There was that December I stopped drinking
things that dampened my speech. Like whiskey and wine
and sometimes my own saliva. I catch a glimpse
of purple stain at the corners of my mouth- the one that must
have said *I'm all yours* before I could wipe it away. I still can't
seem to wipe my mouth clean.

There was that December I yelled at the clerk
who miscounted my change, the telemarketer who called
too late- proud of my voice that was finally being heard
by all the wrong
people. Because I never told you. I never spoke to you loud
enough. I think of how you might not even know
about that December
you turned
into all Decembers.

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The Nagging

The autumn where I sit
in hospital rooms, combing
my mother's black hair as needles
and tubes and bags hang off her
like dying leaves
on an unexpected tree.

Wasn't that her in the kitchen
yesterday? Singing Cat Stevens
and reminding me to change
my sheets. I rolled my eyes
because she would tell me
ten more times, I was
sure.

And now, I want her to nag
me, to sigh heavily with disappointment,
but words only drip from her mouth
like thick syrup and we don't know
if she knows where she is. I change

my sheets five times that day. Ripping
them off because they don't quite fit
the way they used to. Wrinkled
and stained and suddenly I'm praying to
worn out sheets. Sometimes I hear
the nagging, soft and slow, echoing
from the kitchen

as if I would always have
just ten more times.