

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/4

Marty Eberhardt
Autumn Afternoon

Silver City, NM

The dried grasses roll golden
Across the hills,
Clumps of snakeweed amongst them
Spike bright yellow.
Above, the green cottonwood leaves
Seem dipped in autumn's paint.
Sun color distributes itself
Across the landscape,
Spreading its warmth
Before a freeze.
How glad I am
To live in such light
In my life's afternoon.

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/4

Birthday Wishes

Ten

When I was little,
I imagined sailing the seas in our woodbox.
My magic hat would take me
To places in picture books.
Now that I am ten,
I'd rather go in a real sailboat
With my parents,
My best friend, and, I guess,
My little brother and sister.
I read about it; families do this!
No school for a year.
We could just read books,
And catch fish from the ocean,
Those people didn't say they had any problem
With sharks.

Twenty

I'll be late for Thanksgiving dinner.
I wish I could skip it.
It's a beautiful beach day,
And you wouldn't want to invite
My new boyfriend.
He doesn't use
The right silverware.
His hair's longer than mine,
And he'd be awful at charades.
Okay, I'm coming.
No time for a shower; don't object if I
Trail a bit of sand on the dining room floor.

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/4

Thirty

Mother said she couldn't believe I had a gray hair.
I have several, and two children, too.
Once I believed that of course one slept,
How mundane.
I try to remember how that felt
As I sail through the freeways
In a minivan.
Emerging from it,
One hand in my toddler's,
The baby carrier against my breast,
Diapers and snacks dangling beside,
I sense deep, warm sleep,
Somewhere nearby, trying to
Seduce me,
So regular, quiet, and gentle,
Like little waves . . .
My child drops my hand, shrieking with the tease
Of the chase.
I snatch him up
Before he reaches
The street.

Good Lord,
I'd trade a week's sleep
For just one
Of his
Solemn, sweaty embraces.

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Forty

Could there be a moment
That is mine,
All mine,
A delicately colored shell
Found at the lowest tide?
No child, no boss, no employee, no husband
Pulling at my hem,
Penciling me in,
Why bother to ask?
Of course I'll be there.
My littlest one's toy boat
Takes him to Africa.
Ah, I would settle for
The Jersey Shore
If I could go
Alone.

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/4

Fifty

They have gone to college,
My babies, my little loves.
A Costa Rican woman asked,
"How can you bear it?"
I said,
"This is how we do it
In our culture.
I doubt it's harder for me
Than for you."

So my husband and I
Scramble our Sunday eggs
In the nude.
No more high school productions –
We see fine theater.

Kayaking today,
I pull my paddle out,
And lay it across the boat.
Swaying
In the ocean swells,
I ask,
"How much do you miss them?"
You paddle on.
You miss them no less;
You're just more practical.

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Sixty

Has the right side of my brain atrophied?
Has the seductive status of being Senior Staff,
Lost me to half my self?
Seeking the right answers every morning in the shower,
Sleepless nights doubting my choices.
My blood pressure is stupidly high.

I long to find that place
Where once again
I celebrate sky's riotous pinks and oranges
As sun sinks over the ocean,
Where the evening sands
Turn rose-colored,
And I have
No
Thought.

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/4

Seventy

Little one,
Are you really funnier than your father was,
Or is it that,
Unlike forty years ago,
I sleep at night?
Oh, grandchild, what a world you have to explore:
Deep red canyons
Swirling with the pattern of ancient seas,
Mists like summer shawls over the shoulders of rocky peaks,
People who speak rolling languages
Or ones that chop like axes,
Friends who will make you laugh,
And little one,
You will one day appreciate
The ones who make you cry.
May the tide of your joys
Carry you
Past your sorrows.

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/4

Eighty

I'm having trouble ignoring
My knotty hands
And bad right knee.
I don't need blonde hair
Or big boobs
Or a smooth face.
I just want
To take a short walk
Down the beach
With my husband
And without
Thinking about this damned old body.

Ninety

You have recorded the sea
And placed it by my bed.
I am left with your voices
Surrounding me,
And the sound of waves.
I wish for
Nothing more.

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/4

Bluestorm

It's not rain, it's
Hail
Pummeling the junipers,
And now the berries
Fly across my path.
Icy-blue berries and
Hailstones: which is which?
Both make me stumble.
Both glow
In the thunderous light
Of late summer gone rogue.
The balls land loud
On my nylon hood,
Bounce off my ungloved hands
Seed cones and ice, together:
They catch a little light
From the sun
As it jockeys for space
With the clouds
Racing together
To capture the sky.

A berry under a pinyon
Is bluest of all;
Impossibly blue.
It's plastic.
I pocket it.

I could
Bemoan the desecration
Of this wild and chilly moment;
Denounce the oil
That beckons a child

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With bright blue beads
That do not melt
Or grow into fine old trees.
I could
Despair
That my grandchildren
Will find more beads than berries
In their wild walks.
I could
And I've a good mind to.

Or I could
Feel thunder rumble my feet
Smell the sharp crack
Of lightning closer
Than I expected.
I will
Run through the blue seedstorm,
The hailwind.
Through the shaking shrubs,
The spinning leaves.
A moment ago,
I pondered
With oh-so-human logic.
Now, like a bird
Diving for the deep branches,
Like a leaf carried
Rock to rock
Down the arroyo,
I am
Routed by rain.