

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/4

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Autumnal Equinox

is such a lovely phrase.
Not the vain, braggadocio
of Summer Solstice,
who is fat with light and heat
and the profligacy of our days.
Not the lean merriment
of Winter Solstice who feasts and
burns candles in the clear blue starlight
to bear us through
the long winter nights.

It is the fulcrum of our cycle,
richer than its sweet, Vernal cousin
because its austere beauty,
the bounty of the golden harvests,
the fiery reds of bitter splendor,
are mounted in loss, in the passing
of things that must pass
for beings such as us, who live by
the seasons of the air,
the quarter of the light.

It is the balancing point,
the reminder that
the greater beauty is always
at the border of light and dark,
sunset, sunrise, the long shadows,
the low ocean sun shattering
into a thousand glittering shards.
Into darkness we are now tipping, yes
but we are also tipping forward—
tipping forward into the stars.

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Passing

There is a subtle thrill to
passing—pulling smoothly around
to the left or right
accelerating
past without disturbing the flow
and leaving behind those who
may can will not commit
to the pace of your destination.
The heart may even quicken
slightly at the small victory
of advancing, less encumbered by
those left behind.

We were told that, in
the moments before
we were passed,
expect such an acceleration

of the pulse—
a little resurgence
that might feel like a
strengthening but
was really the body's last
surge before finally, fading
away,

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in the last step of that
ten-month thigh-deep in wet snow journey
from strange pain to unexpected news but do not
panic to post-op recovery to all-clear to poison to
not all-clear to do not panic because
promising alternatives
to managing
her weight her meds her hydration her bodily functions
her visitors her depression her pain
it's time to think more about managing her pain but do not
panic because right now, no choice but to keep it together.

I cannot say why it so happened
to be me
at that moment,
in that small room filled
with so many she loved,
who was holding her hand—
two traitorous fingers held
against her wrist during that
long, yellow, uncertain, lip-wetting,
med-fogged, shallow-breathed day,

on duty with the little sponge lollipop,
the room still held close within her limp arms and dry lips and tiny
moans,
her wearing the t-shirt of the company where I worked
(cut open up the back to ease its removal).

An hour later as we—my brothers, dad and I,
lifted her body from the bed to the gurney
it was somehow clear:
this body
was no longer
her.

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Of course
even as I had felt her heart quickening under my two fingers
my first thought was that she was circling back to us,

not noticing her accelerate smoothly past us to the left,
lingering just long enough for us to wave
and catch a glimpse of her eyes
in the rear-view
as she pulled away.

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Seeing Blue

It is suggested that humans once
could not see blue.

That there was a time when our eyes
had not yet picked up the knack of it,
and so our brains simply
threw it away.

All that blue.

The ancient Aegean Sea,
pompous jays,
iridescent, indigo scarabs,
Little forget-me-nots, dotting the arctic tundra.
Bulbous and towering clouds, rising
like a phoenix from colorless skies.

What other wonders are still passing,
like water, through the loose fingers of
our still-developing brains?
What colors escape us still
What bird songs do we not yet hear
What smells, what tastes.

And why stop there?
What emotions can we not yet feel
what ecstasy
what pains.

If even blue was a hidden wonder
denied our senses until we'd earned the right of it, then
anything
is still possible.

Even as we rejoice in its blueness,
marvel into what mighty sky the jay may actually take flight.