

Wilderness House Literary Review 15/3

Helen Wang
The Gift

I asked God about the past.

He held up a spool of yarn,
And tossed it down the dark stairs of time.
He sent me chasing it past revolutions and weddings,
Before contemporary and biblical Adams,
When faith was just a whisper.

I found that spool bobbing in the bay of Pangaea,
Or was it the Milky Way?
How all expansive space morphs without a horizon.
The closer I pulled by its quivering string,
The faster the spool unraveled,
Like a wild mane in thirst.

And so, I let it drink.

I let go of birthday parties,
I let go of momentum.
I gave forgiveness to the things my eyes had seen,
Before the first glassy eye was made in the womb.

I heard the sigh of all things nameless.

I asked Buddha whether he really knew the way,
Marie, if she ever thought of cake on the gallows.
I held my grandmother as a girl, and she became an atlas in my lap.

As the sun dialed another hour toward sunset,
I wondered whether anyone has ever stepped in the same Seine twice,
Or whether Time really flows aimlessly in one direction,
Just waiting to be invited in.

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Guest House

I drew the blinds to shut you out,
But something kept insisting itself to me,
Like a pink sunrise through a typhoon.

I got out of bed to find Grief stalking my doorstep,
That ghost of love stuck between the living and the dead.

I drew her a warm salt bath,
Let her dip her battered parts,
Poured her a glass to make it burn easy.

It got later and darker and quieter.

We fell asleep kissing each other's hands,
Like tired old friends.

I woke to a draft through the door
And an empty tub of salt.

The sky said it's time.

Today, I stepped outside.
I planted books where you exist no more,
Untied you from all the street corners you were weighted to.

my love, my love
My heart is helium.

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Reservoir

this is hot rain
the type that makes the dust rise,
soaks the marmalade of
paper scraps and crushed crackers
spread across the pavement.

umbrella blossoms like a black daisy,
spine holding together sheaths of polyester,
a feeble half partition against the chaos,
but once a homestay
for two pairs of feet
traveling in parallel.

inside
thistle sprouts from our apartment bathtub,
spiny tendrils charmed by the stench of
rotting towels we failed to bleach,
unable to confess that not all water is holy.

home is nothing
but a whale's mouth:
what folly,
to be stranded between land and sea,
drinking myself into a thin fog,
as if rain could wash this city of you.