

Wilderness House Literary Review 16/3

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Inside the Valley of Brokeback

Before the wind speaks in tongue of
solitary wolf, moving over then inside
the gulf, wide swatch of land bordered
by cypress where a man can be silent,

left to breathe as the gale howls
for him, what thoughts? except
his hand, wrist and slow whirl of fingers,
cigarette illuming only a fraction of his face.

We do not think of passion, easier to imagine
the plan of God yet, something stirs,
eloquent and elegant in the face of unwashed
skin, this body that rides horses seven hours a day
the other time walking over hillocks, little
mountains that one day could rise.

Is this before or after— funny how it all could be
the same. This stillness, inside it;
my mouth always silent though fingers betray;
a gun at my side but not every time the desire
to kill the wolf when it answers.

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Toe's Bend

Through the bend of a toe I saw
her fragility, the way the large digit,
bare of polish or embellishment set out, commanding
and pale, odd too, a right angle against
the waxy softness of a strong, wide foot, for a second—me,
lost in thought and foolish, thinking of the weight
a foot has to bare but reality brought
a blubbering silence conscious of
gravity, a ninety degrees mistake. Hand
against her back, feeling the quiver of full shoulders as the
woman retched and dry heaved, pain—a cleave cutting
through decorum, only seconds before the slam
of my breaks—relief palpable enough to make me laugh
until this woman hit me, rendering me dumb.

It does not take long—what comes out
in these moments is always the fundamental.
“Is your baby in back?” Alarm twisting an
already contorted face back to normal,
pushing aside the sharp splintering of her bone.
But the back seat is empty, loose crumbs and two
raisons, half hid in the dark, on my way to him, driving
too quickly down a road slick with wet, street lights oozing
like things beautiful—like blood is beautiful,
eventually we all come to realize this. And in her mind
her child and a crib she was still determined to purchase,
my pleas meaningless, not even the brake of a toe
could sever the determination of a mother's ceaseless love. No
doctrine crafted by man is as strong, no training for battle as rigorous.
There is nothing like a woman's love for her child—it is a power limitless.

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True Love

Mother—anchor at my heels,
her blowfish mouth sucks
a lover's hicky, then, lightening flash—
to the bone.

The child with phantom pull
at my breast—
and I bend, touch forehead to sand
attuned for suckle or kick.

How they need—
and I know they
will want me
through death—
for love is the burning, wooden horse,
and beloveds always know
where I hide.