

Wilderness House Literary Review 17/1

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Tonight, I Serve Hope

I'm not much of a cook.
Left on my own, I scrounge
for leftovers or pop popcorn.
But we live in despondent times
so tonight I serve hope for dinner.

I take down our largest pot, the one
my husband uses to boil lobster,
fill it to its brim with all the hope I can
collect—it's spring and the budding trees
have an abundance to share.

I sprinkle in patience, foraged
from fiddleheads, a bit of salt
and pepper, bring it to boil,
let hope simmer all afternoon.

The scent fills the kitchen
and adjacent rooms, drifts upstairs
into bedrooms, the hardest to reach corners,
gets tangled in cobwebs and merges
with dust particles, struggles to enter
plugged pores and clogged nostrils.

I set the table with my finest linen,
grandma's blue bowls and silver spoons,
call the family down to dinner.
I carry that massive pot over
to the kitchen table, careful
not to spill, ladle generous spoonfuls.

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Wary, we wonder, will this broth
be bitter? Will it scorch our tongues,
burn the roof of our mouths, should we
allow the brew to cool?
The oldest among us holds back,
(his heart can only take so much breaking.)

Hungry, sanguine, the youngest
take the first sips. Their mouths
turn up as they swallow.
One by one we slurp, the room resonates
with *mmms* and *aaahs*—we would be wrong
to let the little ones eat alone,
unwise to waste such precious hope.

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Balancing Act

The day's outside emptiness
moves inside, scratches
my skin. I sleep—mute.
At the window, sticks
moan and sway.

Gravel kicks up, splatters
rotting clapboard.
I refuse to rise. The sky settles
grey, not even daybreak
halts the enveloping chill.

Somedays sadness is upon me,
an ancient, frayed quilt, spitting
plumes, the weight of it
wrapped heavy
around my shoulders.

Other days joy, light
as a pine needle, floats
upon a downy,
crystalline sea.
Blue overcomes haze,

mornings boast shadows
and white birch—
I admire the shape
of leafless trees, silhouettes
cast on melting snow,

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syrup slogging
through untangled tubes,
while I balance
precariously between
slick, muddy ruts.

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Ghost Hauntings

Full moon's glow glides
between our shade's wooden slats.
Ghostly images of squandered

time berate me—her final days
crowd my head:
propped up in a hospital bed,

eyes wild, confused,
hands flailing,
reaching out, I stand

in her bedroom doorway
paralyzed by threat
of invisible virus.

Then hospice—
hushed breathing, eyes closed,
unresponsive.

I'm planting a quick kiss
on her soft, wrinkled cheek.
No lengthy hand holding,

no tight hugs or words
of thanks and love.
Is it fear or selfishness

that keeps me from offering
no more than the coldest
good-bye?

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Bathed in slipping lunar light,
you lost in dream beside me,
I consider waking you

to join me in my delirium,
but it seems wrong
to steal you from oblivion

knowing I'm obliged
to meet these ghosts,
haunting me.

Your awakened presence
might scare them away—
I'm not ready to give them up.