

Wilderness House Literary Review 18/3

Lois Marie Harrod
Sometimes

I cannot bear
the weight of words,

these little bones dragging
up cobbled hills

me, the larded lady with spiky heels
and the greasy dictionary:

a stiletto in every article,
hunger in every noun,

all that word made flesh
on the skewer—

and the heaviest of all,
love, that boulder that cartwheels

back down the hill
every time I push it up.

Sleeping with Love as He Grows Old

He tosses but cannot turn,
something has happened to his spine,
to each little vertebra, to the nerves,
sciatic and femoral, something desperate,
isn't Love supposed to grow stronger, not weaker?

Love tries, but no chance to rest,
he's up a thousand times a night, his prostate
now larger than his heart and his heart,
that huge organ he promised forever,
is failing too, the San Andreas Fault,
Etna, Vesuvius, Love's lava growing cold.

Didn't he do what he ought, practice
what he preached?—oh he was so kind, watched his diet,
exercised like a madman cycling the globe.

Oh, Love, where have you done,
your body thin as a sheet?
Dickinson said you *can do all but raise the dead*,
and now you cannot raise a finger.

The dead can make any song come on the radio¹

Hilda was an old friend, in her fifties when we met her
on the sidewalk of Riverside Avenue and she told us
how to get to Sears where we needed to buy a bed
if we didn't want to sleep on the floor at 518,
our first and first-floor apartment with a toilet on a dais.

And though Hilda seemed to like me at first,
she found more and more to disapprove of as the years
went by, as she made herself our local grandma—
I was drab, she said, I didn't wear bright clothes, I didn't
eat enough because I worried about my figure,
I went about cooking the dinner to which we had invited her
instead of sitting in the living room conversing
as her etiquette required, even though
I was putting the last turnips in her vegetarian glop.
She seemed to expect me to wave
a magic wand and zap her overcooked eggs
and let the rice burn as the salad tossed itself.

So death became all about food—I know, a big leap—
but she was *fat* because this was the 70's, before
the demise of *stout, portly obese, big,*
and Hilda was always on one diet or other,
every summer giving up her fresh peaches
with their cruel carbs, and bananas, those brutal bananas—
as for me, I ate peaches while she decided I was anorexic,

but, that was another story

Hilda did not want to hear, and so I did not tell her I had
counted calories every day since I was in sixth grade
because who wants to hear about a father who sings

¹ "What the Dead Can Do," Oliver Baez Bendorf, *They [the dead] can make any song come on the radio*

Wilderness House Literary Review 18/3

"I don't want her, you can have her, she's too fat for me" all the way to Baltimore with that 40's song blaring on the radio in that 1939 Ford where I was squashed in the back seat between my two skinny sisters,

because who wants to hear about Bobby Jones, that boney blue-eyed rat, who said "You'ain't nothing but a fatso" that day when I told my teacher Mrs. McKee that she needed to read from books about famous women as well as that big one of hers about famous men. "All the boys hate you," said Bobby as we waited in line for round little Mr. Basil to open the music room door.

So I do believe the dead or the dying can do some things like continue to shout the nasty things they said, but when Hilda told me she now had proof of everlasting life, I told her that n refused to believe.

Seems that before her friend Connie died of cancer Hilda had asked her for a sign, *Send me a sign*, she said, sitting beside Connie in Helene Fuld Hospital, *send me a sign that there is life after death*, and sure enough three days later that radio which hadn't worked for years, like most of the electric objects stacked aisle-high in that house of Hilda's, mysteriously popped on when a semi rumbled by on Route 29 and that was ample proof, she said, Connie was alive, there was an eternity.

She turned it on, Hilda said.
and it was playing *Big Bottom*
which must have been proof of something.

Wilderness House Literary Review 18/3

The sky unraveling another season

Almost seven months since you left
without your clothes, slipped into the fire
naked and did not walk out, so you missed
the heat and freeze, our grandson Will

falling 78 feet off a precipice in a blizzard, and breaking
only one vertebra—the catastrophe
we feared when he told us of solo treks in the Cascades,
the sort of miracle we read with disbelief.

So, of course, I know you don't know
of his near death, . . .

I am talking to myself as I often
talked to you deep in your books,

sometimes peering over your glasses,

Did you say something?

And yes, I am going on again
as if you are still . . . listening.

It happened three days after you died,
and I suppose I could say he rose
from certain death as I somehow
thought you would leave the ICU.

Father's Day, June 19th,
and we went hiking
on Baldpate Mountain,
a place you liked to walk,

when we got the phone call . . .

Will lying in the snow
having lived through the blizzard night,
rescue on its way—

Wilderness House Literary Review 18/3

though rescue didn't arrive for hours,
and of course, many have told me
that it was you were watching over him,
reached down from heaven, they said,

let him fall in just the right place.

But what if the experts don't arrive?

Maybe it's Glenn Gould
playing those French suites,
No. 5 in G Major, the Sarabande,

maybe am I hearing major as minor,
the Gavotte and Bourée,
as silly tears lifting
and next my favorite—the Loure,
slow dance in triple time,
child skipping down the street, Oh, god,
you still plodding beside me, still
here . . .
and I am still slowing beside you,

why didn't I leap more when
you were alive, and now the gigue.

Well, let's play it again
until the experts come.

You know, the ones that put
your life back together, not the charlatans,
don't you want the smooth skin of a mango?
your eyes going green? Something
to tune the strings.