

Wilderness House Literary Review 2/4

George Held

A Wife's Tale

What's a woman to do
When she knows her mystery's
Gone in her husband's eyes,
Like the boy at the fair
Who glimpsed the showgirl stuff
Her bra with cotton backstage?

What's a woman to do
When she sees her husband
Leer at their slim waitress
And flirt with the cashier
Like a young man with wild
Oats still to be sowed?

Shall she become a shrew
And needle her husband
For every transgression
Or accept the martyr's role
And let her skin be flayed
Or heart be pierced with steel?

Shall she let a surgeon
Sand, burn, and tuck her skin
To cosmetize the signs
Of age away, as do
The stars and most of her
Friends at her stage of wife?

And would the surgery,
Even if it didn't leave skin
Shiny as a doll's face
Or mouth in a grimace,
Return her to her man's
Embrace, once the mystery's gone?

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Or will she count it luck
That she can now escape
Wifely obligations
To be all alluring,
And welcome Cinderella's
Return to the pumpkin,

Now that she knows how
To value orange skin
With deep ridges, to make
A succulent fall soup,
To bake a fragrant pie,
To laugh like Jill-o'-lantern?