

Wilderness House Literary Review 20/3

Erin Smola

Fall bled

red leaves, of course,
from bark the color of skin,
branches bent as arms,
twigs spread like veins.

And the fallen dried
and scabbed brown
in a pile
on the ground.

Why I am cheered by dead leaves
when I chill at the sight of blood?

Fall bled alone and stark,
begged no love
for her naked wounds.

Did I do wrong when I left her to die,
crunching through her colors,
calmly passing by?

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Fleeting

In the time it takes to draw a single breath, another oak leaf has fallen to the wet pavement below. It emits a soft sigh, and in that breath, the grey-noon clouds cross the sun. In the time it takes for rain to fall, my thoughts turn to you alone.

You, alone
a solitary exhalation

In the time it takes to notice the weight inside my chest, my heart has pumped and squeezed at least another hundred beats. You've stirred my body into awareness. I look down—my arms, marred with the unwanted tattoos of my veins, splotchy blue.

The word *perfection*
crumbles from your lips

In the time it takes to pick up the phone, your mother's voice has traveled one-hundred-twenty miles to spit the same harsh tone inside your ear again, again. It would take a second for me to reach out my hand, a century for you to grasp it.

You forget
I'm only flesh and blood

Post-Hemingway angst

You're a scab on my heart
I pick open again and again.
Compulsive fingernail-flicks,
then blood, red and wet,
flows like tears,
drip dripping onto the ground;
I can feel again. I remember
who—no, what—I am:
Human, animal...rational?
No.
(but I really do try!)
It's question of balance,
how many finger-flicks will it take
'til there's nothing left
but the nail-bitten core?
Nevermore to flam
its bodhran-language in my chest,
thrumming through my veins,
up into my mouth to swallow back
before I embarrass myself.