

*Wilderness House Literary Review 3/2*

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**Stem Lust**

Would you understand? It is August. I am vanilla  
clouds spinning like hammocks, calling like rain  
in tongues I don't value. Or am I blue,  
a curbside flower faded as a rag doll, cinched  
at the waist, nameless as November?

Of what is left I wear old camisoles, pulped threads, immaculate  
as *ru'ach* to touch. There is a street, a crack  
pipe lane cutting between chain link fences and one  
ramshackle deli. It is Harlem, poor, shuttered  
eyes in shakedown for somewhere else, not here,  
everything outside too patent.

Know this. There's this hotel epoxied like a scar —  
fat tissue puckered into itself to signal the lost  
in their 2 a.m. rummaging. He cups his hands  
like crumpled paper cups at migraine-me, a free one  
on a fiend's grip on a stem-lust pins and needles.  
Must be November, rain.

A voice jerks his finger past the spit, plays  
with it real nice, devil's dick sparking off the sun  
for his never-gets-a-job, schizophrenic anyway  
crack hankering run off, maggot-eyes bloating  
while his voices match the cadence of my rain.

I see him there ten blocks away, grateful  
on all fours, his lost or sold-his-belt pants falling,  
grateful to the roses stem and rocks alka-lining his lips.  
Can you picture, can you get this husband starting  
that stem as his wife down the rabbit hole waysides,  
even in August or daylight?  
This was the girl too pretty for mornings.

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I was trying to sleep toward the beginning,  
to prism glass and make-believe-peace lied  
neatly pleated between a Japanese plum tree's fruit.  
Rice-a-Roni frying on the stove.

You get the plot. It's the early '60's in August  
or November, in suburbia where all girls are waiting  
for the 6:11 Babylon train to drop off Daddy.  
There is a security here.

Pink flamingos on two lawns swelter in August.  
One breeze trills my mother's crimson wind chimes  
against the so clean you-might-walk-through pane  
in August in the '60's, rainbows glide along  
all Madelines in stiff yellow pinafores  
behind dining room doors, safe as delicate skeletons.

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Near the hotel, in August, little girls wear low-cut tank tops  
across the alley wedge, pink against the slumping chain links.  
They get lost in the sequel of scorched lips, light bright. And I  
just know it. There is something happening here  
to the sun where they walk - they both rise with a shrug  
that enervates the link between *I and Thou*  
in August or November where they structure  
their world in *I – It*, here, not somewhere else,  
to free their potential to be  
who they are, the drive-  
by drive to be high. In August,  
in November, in the absence of season.

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**Incarnate**

Brought you home by a tug under your arms  
as one would a hefty bag or drunken lout.

Home from sullen water, disobedient, be dead—  
(Just don't drown), in from the gulf, and left

the way a wave is, graceful and without target.  
Wave could not see when the sand had turned cold,

could only feel drizzle and inward it revolved  
on itself, now past able to intuit more.

Sand could not taste trenched apologies, or sodden  
sludge-grass, or blood-licked lips in from the lantern coast

that punctured sea lavender to sorrel and silk to thread.  
What's best kept is this copy of you, memory-shell.

Your gluttonous need for my skin. Your skin  
like a sweating sky, hovering. There,

now, be alive, heart. Choose these sunflowers  
he brings you in lieu. They wave their twist-off faces

crippled as studs beneath window sills. There,  
now. Maybe we can talk.