

Wilderness House Literary Review 4/3

Judy Huddleston

Before the Honeymoon

After the kiss, I drove home. Got in bed, turned off the lights. I heard his motor, the wheels on gravel. Deb's red Z. Did I mention that John had a broken leg? That he was in a cast, used crutches, that his long dark hair swung in whip-like sheets as he came to the door? He didn't have to knock. We didn't have to talk. It was simple.

He had to confess. Yes. Tell her it was over between them; the end. I remember waiting. Not knowing exactly what he would decide. It was her birthday that weekend; they spent two last days together, ending it. When he came back it seemed a dream come true, like I'd always been waiting for him, like it had all happened before.

Did it mean much when my heart sped up to 220 a minute? I *did* have a heart condition, had been hospitalized several times. Did that faze me? Did I sense the warning there? It raced in my throat as I sucked his cock but I didn't care, only felt oddly comforted that I could do both things at once. His skin so soft, satiny warm and damp. That mattered.

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Deb's Red Datsun

Deb. She dreamed John was fucking me. Woke up at 3 AM from her dream, walked outside and saw her car was gone, her Datsun 240 Z. She drove his red truck past my little blue cottage, and there was her car, parked right in front.

Deb had a puffy face and slit eyes because she was allergic to pollen. It made her seem not quite human, ugly or at least very plain. But besides that, boring, boring, one of those women born to be wives. When I went first hiking with her and Vicki, they talked about their men, the brothers, as if discussing their children with great pride. Then they talked about canning peaches and raspberry preserves. Deb seemed nice and simple; beside her shapely body, I couldn't see what John saw in her. Except the domestic stuff, wifely chores I didn't do like cooking and cleaning, staying home after he cheated and lied.

Later, I'd see their house in Blackfoot. Clean and ordinary, solid blue collar. Serenity Prayer on the kitchen wall. Certainly not for him: for her? I would walk through that house stunned: he'd had a life here. Almost unimaginable, homely as she, homely as Thaddeus his brown bird dog. But still, I wanted him. That's how I thought: the city girl, home-wrecker. We had nothing in common. But the physical pull, not only sex, the mere being together, like two dogs who get along very well, preverbal, no words. If only none were needed.

Only twenty years later did I stop to ponder if we broke her heart that summer. Of course we did. But Deb played it cool and gritty. Wrote him kind and newsy letters about his friends, their little town, their other dog. Said she loved him and understood. Never anything bitchy. I know. I read the letters. Pale blue, lemon yellow with pressed wild flowers. Never demanding. But it didn't work. We had to burn up first. By then it was too late.

Don't you feel kind of small, his brother asked. I didn't answer, just stared out at the sky. You don't understand. We can't be stopped. It's not a choice. It's not a decision. It just is. But I didn't care, not really. I didn't care about any of the wives, either. They were wives. I wasn't. They had men in ways I never would; I had them in ways they never would. I didn't want them as *mine*. Not that couples seemed that together to come apart so easily. In any case, we'd blow up, destroyed by the same dynamite. Deb left town in her red Datsun, left for their old life in the Idaho flatlands, to which John could never return.

In the Mountains

We fish. We visit an old woman with brown braids who lives in a cabin on the national forest's edge. Over the red-checked oilcloth tabletop, they smoke cigarettes and talk about how life's changed. We visit a couple in a trailer perched on top of a cliff overlooking the river. The man and John fish; the woman and I make small talk—they live here year round, retired, don't miss the flatlands, the city, the people. Later, checking into some cabin in the middle of the night, things aren't nice enough for me. I worry about his roughness, know I'm not physically strong enough to keep pace much longer. But the next night in the bar at Redfish Lake, just looking at him fills me with pleasure; that he is mine, that he wants me as much. He and the bartender belong to another world, but as his woman I can come too. As I once went with a corporate V.P. to his world, a poet to his, a producer, a rocker: all have their worlds. But John's seems the most exotic as they discuss teenagers doing heroin in barns, the INL plant poisoning Idaho's famous potatoes, the deer on the walls, guns, pheasant, tourists invading their mountains. Only I get tired much sooner than he does. He can go on for hours. Even with coke, I can't. But the moon is still on the dark water. We walk out on the pier, listen to waves lap edges of the shore; occasionally fish jump up and splash back down. If only I could keep him. Like this: now. Capture him in the moment. Hold him here forever. Who could ever be so beautiful? I love his toes; I love everything about him. The way he laughs at me when I get weird. "Having another wave, hon?" he asks. Yeah, one long wave. Why does it have to end?

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When Venus Cries

I woke in bed, bleeding between my legs, staining the sheets in her guest bedroom dark red. The blackish clots of blood on his mother's sheets beckoned the spirit of a widow in black lace. She only came out at night, lived shrouded in darkness, pale fingers shining as she closed the closet door. She knew my unborn child was escaping on the bed, another soul returning from matter to being without substance.

His mother slept two doors down the haunted hallway. Cancer cells multiplied and receded, controlling him between wives and lovers. He returned to her latest home as his two brothers from different fathers had. That night John was in Idaho Falls, melding nuclear plant pipes, poisoning his slight body with more chemicals, borrowing oblivion. But the hometown boys had it figured, knew they were caught, shot more holes in plate glass with their newest guns.

I lay captive, post abortion, listening to the widow's spirit. She advised me on murder laws, husbands she was chasing down, children missing. A hungry mother was willing to eat her son's best intentions, give him reasons to live with injections of insulin, codeine and cocaine. Kill them, kill them all, bastards, she whispered in my ear. Watch them raping you, leaving you with his mother, losing your love to blood. Look at those brothers, brutalizing what they cherish most. Kill them, kill them, she said, give me justice for the night he left forever.