

## Wilderness House Literary Review 4/3

*Lynn Lifshin*

### WEEK OF NIGHT MARES

In blackness, the cat  
leaps thru a screen. I'd  
kept gates in front of the  
door and she's not even  
a kitten, trying to sliver  
thru strange holes but  
somehow it happened.  
It was in the apartment  
in VT I no longer have,  
my sister's room, the  
beige one where she fed  
pigeons until the room  
filled with lice. My cat,  
Jete, isn't really a jumper  
but she leaped down two  
floors to the banks of  
Otter Creek. Once a  
pregnant girl threw her  
self against the rocks for  
shame of beginning a  
baby. There's no time  
to think. No back exit  
to the water so I dart  
half dressed to Main St  
to the small road my  
mother carried her garbage  
to. I'm calling *Jete, Jete*  
and asking people. If she  
used the road she could  
run out into the street  
and the cars wouldn't see  
her, tawny and ticked  
or she'd freak and run in

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to a truck. *Jete, Jete*. I'm  
hoarse. It happened so  
fast but an Aby, who  
wouldn't want her. *Baby,*  
*Baby* I'm half singing  
across the cars and the  
abandoned railroad track.  
Soon it would be dark  
and the only stars, some  
strangers' cigarettes

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### CHAMELEON

after class he taps your  
hand as if the curtains  
coming down and a  
new face will walk in.  
Maybe he sings,  
doing an old Fred  
Astaire song, doing  
the "on the Avenue"  
or "Astaire Glide."  
*Lady Killer* someone  
hisses, *it's not fair*  
*to have so much*  
one woman sighs,  
looking. She won't  
look straight at him.  
Like the sun, it could  
blind you. Better  
look at the he he was  
the last night at Soul  
Train, glaring and  
cold as if tango made  
him nauseous. Better  
hope he'll have bad  
breath or smell when  
he holds you

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### RERUN

I think I've swallowed  
the absurd longing  
like a cat falling in  
love with a dead maple  
tree. You know the  
story. I throw out the  
chocolate he gave, the  
strawberry going bad  
like the rest, better in  
a poem than in your  
mouth a friend said.  
She is right. What if  
I had put him in my  
body. The valium  
makes it a relief not  
to think tho it will  
probably not be as  
easy to try to dance  
any thought of him  
out of me in the ballet  
class I'm headed for

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**THE CRUSHED, PRESSED WILD PLUM**

falling out of my note book  
as much a metaphor for  
how I fantasized, stupidly.  
It went from lipstick blush,  
a pale flesh, a scent as musky  
as the crevice of a body. Now,  
it's flattened and dry too. It's  
dead, nothing could revive it.  
At least the fantasy sparked  
a few good poems. Now  
they're shriveled, lifeless,  
not even an extended metaphor.  
Not even a dream. And what  
of the crow that's squawking  
wildly at the door to your  
studio, a sure sign, always, in  
films of death

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**LIKE A STRESSED TREE BLOOMING MORE WILDLY**

my hair's grown  
down my back these  
months. It's an old  
story of the daughter  
blossoming as the  
mother's hair goes  
grey. No, that's a  
lie. I never wanted  
children, only your  
skin and my old skin  
holding me as  
it had

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**BALLROOM, BLUE**

so this is how it  
feels, the floor tilting  
where we locked in a tango

slipping away as  
someone changes the cd

what was ghostly as  
strains going under

with the Titanic.  
How could I know I was  
stuck on  
an iceberg

under all the show, the glitz?

How could I hear  
signs of distress. How could  
I not believe it was

really happening.  
Or expect to survive

What was it, your  
moon light sea eyes  
that paralyzed?