

Wilderness House Literary Review 4/3

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Diva (Via a Review of a Biography)

You could never be comforted
even with another angel's fidgeting stylus
penning you into more hermit roles
(rather than the coveted countess or
the Victorian wife driven mad by her husband)
those light-ravaged close-ups bearing up
with the stash of old headlines puttied over,
your collapsing breasts exalted only
by hobby kit, mesh, and more hoopla.
At the end, an admirer couldn't tell zipper from scar,
a hook from the probe of some spotlight,
your latest reinforcements sometimes visible from the air
(partly sunny, southeast winds 20 mph)
and that commingling of lacquer, decay,
recognizable from our deepest of dreams.
Now, we navigate your luggage on the snowiest field—
21 steamer trunks, 35 large suitcases, 18 medium,
9 smaller ones, 15 hatboxes, not to mention
a custom-built Cadillac and its shadowy fin,
that darkest of pools recovering your blur of a visage.
But how offstage they lined up for your eggs—
the golden stream you dispensed to your entourage
attempting to ease down your guttural demands
while your husband (with whom you never once slept)
scribbled this last minute addition into the script,
your character less skewered, no longer coughing up feathers.
Only the camera would have any effect on you--
convincing this cut out, this star manufactured
for the vacuous to submit its stick figure to the infinite,
working towards a near-technical brilliance
benumbed beneath the set's harshest filament.
You tell me what to do and it will be beautiful.
Though each of your lovers saw themselves

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as looking better having found themselves beside you
it was only the angle, the lens, that was novel.

In the end every memory you had shook off
would remain as mere tremor, the result of some chill.

There, alone with your bottles and pills in the hotel,
you turned the ghost inward to rewrite what
you never once in your life had been able to feel.

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What Winter Will Not Tell Us

To convince yourself of blood
try rubbing the dry spit of crickets
into the places your bones cross.
Tumble what is left of your dead aunt's
hard candies around in your mouth.
Stick both your wrists towards the sun
and assure the world you're little more
than the path it took getting here.
That there's color, blink the trees into hysterics.
Then listen for the air being executed
and the snow as its roused by more snow.
To remember what light there was
sneak out to the barn as the sky regains feeling.
Watch for the chains scraping asphalt
and your breath startled by its own presence.
For reminding yourself that there's mystery
shake yourself free from your shadow.
Then let your shadow reciprocate.
When your soul's had a day or two jump on you
interrogate the teeth by your bed.
Take a cue from the excuses of crows,
pop one less of the pills that did nothing.
And ignore most advice about getting more
water and sleep unless the pages its pulled from
are so clear you leave them as something near ice.

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Spell

An ageless ache diminished
by the tug of a wire,
the shrugging off of a ghost,
you talk the sun down from the sill
and surrender to what stillness
the crickets haven't torched
having somehow caught on
to the gags of god's children,
become immune to their antics--
wronged no more and belonging
to nothing but the salvaged wrecks,
the glimpses through fogged glass,
your visitation's a fractured grin,
an eternal shifting between forms
where the haunted can not tell
extended wince from theatrics
or frailty from coerced cabaret.

After a life spent confessing
to the slats of the shutters,
being bordered by flowers
which contained in abundance all you lacked,
you now try to measure up
to the chronic notes of mosquitoes, the radio drift,
try to hulk into something less lonesome,
less depleted and the swing and its singing
of woes long-confined to the throat's
now embodied in strung things
you're reminded of by your fingers
while the dullest of moonlight is sequestered
in Formica and these whirls of spilled
sympathies and protocol.
How is it now, the world can be redeemed

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by a breeze or the whir of a fan
when you know how to stick to the eye slits,
understand it has all been an elaborate tease.

Someone sneezes and you bless them,
bless the wrists you have kept up
your sleeve and the soul you have lugged
up the stairs every night
toward the awful exchange of bed and body
where the tongue loosed with light
seeks the hollow of memory
and you look out as if posed--
for everyone that's been taken away
though they'd given so little--
giving up that last smile
for the past that's possessed you
and the future you've long done without.

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The Attraction

Rather than vacuuming
up metallic blueberries,
rambling down mountain
sides or standing up
asterisked against the sky
where it torches the air
with its most ancient of breaths,
this bear never shakes off
that dusty pelt of sleep,
its bones hollowed out to near-
airiness spread-eagling itself in
a puddle of its own piss
at the bottom of a drained pool,
sometimes reliving some dream
where it shakes off the dead
to the sound of dull applause
only to have to suck up a peanut
cranked out from a machine
or to let its tongue sample
the breeze through the bars,
maybe teethe on the padlock
that is giving off some sun
like a warrior's shield.

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Afterlife

No call for any backs there,
for those limbs crumpling up
into yet one more paradox.
Yes, your yoke will be scrapped
and your scars taken up by another.
And o how the heart will resound once again!
All our posturing, a strategy left to our bones,
the skull no longer airing its grievances.
And with nothing to tally or calculate
the wind will not play us for fools
and without any wings to be fastened
we will finally be returned via gravity
where we're divided up, separated
by little but this light and this air.