

Wilderness House Literary Review 4/4

kim triedman

Suffocation

At the edge of what one can bear there is a house.
See for yourself. The pickets are white;
they always will be. The path up to the door
is pilfered from the grass. Step inside: there is
no dog. There is a window but the sky
is not admitted by the blinds. I should have known.
The sound you hear is silence. The sound you hear
is your own breathing. Even the walls have learned
to hold their tongues. Mind the sharp corners;
they are everywhere. The dishes shine so hard they
hurt the eyes, and upstairs in the dark the sheets
are starched and neatly folded. I should
have known— the teacups, the spoons. And all those
photographs so clever and contented. Once
I let myself in the front door. I thought it would be
warm. Once I sat at the table. There was
no food. Once I went upstairs and slipped under
the sheets. They were gone the next day. I tried
to scream and nothing came out. There is a
chill. Mind the corners. That yawning inside is
hunger. The sound you hear is your own breathing.
You'd think the air would be so clean. I should
have known.

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Casseroles

It has always been a kind of life—
drawbacks, cars and kids, chicken for dinner;
even a Scottish maid who lost her teeth then
moved away. What can I say? My mother
loved me, the beds were high and wide and
piled thick with quilts; and the mornings they were
damp with dew. Yet still I waken in the night
with shaking hands. And winters, too: they're
so much longer than they used to be.

Answer me this: where do we put it all?
The pieces, I mean— sofas, guilt, the price
of gas – all of it tossed together like so many
Sunday casseroles. Nothing but a
lifetime can contain it: no box or poem
long enough, no perfect proof. All those loose
ends, those partial truths; memories long and
mazed as New York City streets. There is no
orbit here, no perfect round— none of it proceeds
as one might reasonably expect, like a novel
that circles back to the beginning again,
a good novel, even the tiniest details
resurrected; accounted for.

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Bedtime stories

Speak to me now. Tell me
of the flame in my hair
and the shadows of moon.
Tell me how the owl in the tree
took flight
while we weren't watching
and wooded paths wound circles
round our feet. I will

know it all. There was a
world inside a world,
greening in winter, bursting,
cleaving like warm fruits.
Even when the winds howled,
even then,
there was a fire
in the middle, banked
and blue, there were
simple burnished stars
like embers in the sky. If only
your hand, dangling; if only
the time it found its way
up to my lips— tell me again
how that story ends.