

Wilderness House Literary Review 5/1

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The Consigned Witness

The King said *when the time comes, you will know*. Then he was murdered. Unceremoniously. Behind a barn before no crowd, at night. He also said *love is tolerance, a putting off of wit*. I crouched behind a bush and prayed my good prayer of mourning. He was right about a lot of things but he was also wrong about a lot of things. His murderers agreed *more bad than good*. Their axe came down upon his neck. I crouched lower and prayed my good prayer of mourning again. The body was thrown into the lake. The King was dead, the time had come. Choices surrounded us like paintings spaced along a wall. They argued about what to do with the head.

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Presidio, Texas, 1994

A giant moth flew around my hotel room
until it hit the ceiling fan and shot
down to the floor. I closed the screen door
and walked down the street killing mosquitoes
two at a time because they never come all
at once. A lady opposite me, appearing pregnant
and older, paced the sidewalk, turning abruptly
like a soldier. I've seen her before at the flea
market selling adult videos next to the man
with plastic eyes who swallows fishhooks
and then coughs them back up to sell
them. Outside the only bar in town a wrinkled dobro
player sat on the curb, keeping the beat
with his breath while bouncing his knees and churning
out a shucking rhythm despite having two
fingers on his left hand. Inside, still slapping
at mosquitoes, I listened to a story about a high school
football team that won the State Championship
in 1962, disproving the myth that Mexicans
can't run the option. Juan Espinoza was the savior
that year just as sure as he was telling the story
this year. The men moved slowly around
the table taking turns while sudden rain tapped
down on the tin roof but wasn't as loud
as you might think. Then there was this story
about missing chickens and half-eaten goats.
Something was out there in the night
waiting patiently as death. I leaned over,
told him a lion had been caught up north.
He ignored me and ended his story
by saying he's too old to tell time but sometimes
at night it gets so quiet he can hear
the crunching step of a scorpion and even
feel the tingling of its impressive sting.

Same Ol' Magazine Blues

By this particular Tuesday we had grown tired of the same smooth skinned girls with the same, clean facial expressions and plus, there wasn't even that many of them to begin with. Most of them had on clothes and after awhile it was almost the same as looking at a Sear's lingerie ad. Almost. We sat on my parent's bed, passing the magazine and still looking but not as hard. Alex turned up the radio. It had a guy with a scratchy voice and sometimes he used words like damn and broad, words my mom told us not to use, in between blues songs by men whose voices were slurred. "Call now and receive a piece of the cross with every donation," the radio man grumbled after a song called "Crossroads" and we both heard someone in the background laughing as if it had been a joke. "What is he talking about," Alex asked, "what cross?" "The cross," I told him. But we were still confused so we took turns with the magazine for another thirty minutes or so and then returned it to my dad's drawer.