

Wilderness House Literary Review 5/4

Jessica Harman

This Small Coffee Is All I Can Afford

There was a long line and the woman in front of me was in a tizzy about cake.

Carrot or Mocha, both are storms I cannot afford.

Arguments and calories are too expensive for me, now.

I ordered a small coffee, and the barista spoke to me in English when I addressed him in French.

That's Montreal, sometimes—so many languages like petals on a tree, cascading all around.

The politics were subtle and I had forgotten that confusion.

This was a happy city inside a sad drama and I knew how to work it for maximum joy.

A café where there was a clash amongst the people forking salad into their mouths.

A man smiled knowingly at me as I talked to my cell phone.

A pair of ladies draped scarves over the backs of chairs next to me as the sky swirled in their teacups.

A city made of wind breezed by the window on a bicycle made of afternoon blue.

I wished the world were easier, as we all do.

I stirred my coffee as if it were a long novel and I would never finish it.

I felt very real, like a stone in somebody's pocket, or a camera that's broken

That we once threw into the river, saying, Amen, and it splashed and made a crown of white water

Before it sank in the St. Lawrence. That really happened. You had to be there.

It began to rain but then stopped and something was affirmed by that, something like hope.

I admired the figure eight of pigeons outside the picture window that looked out onto the brick

Paved street of tears and desire and lonely but fulfilled wandering, and desperation.

I knew I would not have enough money to spend to get through, whatever getting through means.

I had spent too much on other hopes, other wishes, other dreams.

So I went on talking on my cell phone, solving

The riddle.

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One Thing I'll Say About The Edge

That there was a way but I did not know the way and all religions failed to carry me across the water.
I wanted to explain so much but the sun kept rising and clouding my vision.
I wanted to tell you what it was like.
To just be inside this skin and feel the heat of an ordinary day.
It was amazing.
To watch the birds gathering, the traffic going by.
That the tulips were loveliest when their perfection rotted
And the bouquet became disheveled like a storm.
That my heart is off kilter and I am seeking a way of teaching myself compassion, continually.
That I see you as some stranger who has become close, and we speak as if through megaphones
And smoke signals. Though we are blood.
And that my table is set with candlelight and I am a guest in my own life being polite.
There are so many things, such as that there is a volunteer
Job waiting for me in which I can become saintly in soup kitchens.
That the strangest meetings
Haphazardly at bus stops
Can be turning points in our lives, because they are meetings with angelic messengers.
That we can go on forever and say nothing
That hits the one vibrant note of roses blossoming.
That there is an underworld and I have traveled through it on the off chance.
That it is impossible to become like myth,
But still possible to conceive of one's self in a labyrinth,
And build wings out of beeswax and paper.
That we are wandering, and I am wandering
Through you, and you through me.
And that is the maze we are in, continually.
That there is nowhere to go, and we are everywhere.
To think that I could think things into being,
Actions, ways the world would unfold.
That we could all do this.
It was the most difficult thing to do, to be,
And it was much easier than listening to the music
Between us, the song our interactions,
Mundane and important conversations, and you are the whole world,
Peering in at me. I try to exist as I am,
And as I will be,
Though I do not know what that is.
I am searching.

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Elegies And Life

I wanted to offer some kindness, but I was preoccupied with the cutlery in the drawer.
The way you thought reality was stupid was written all across your frown.
You were from elsewhere. I understood that music can sometimes solve everything,
Like looking into the sky and peering into infinity,
But thought better of telling you this bluntly, since I had just met you.
Your cousin, my roommate, looked for things to say and spoke with you about childhood,
As if it were a mythical place that could bandage things with good memories.
The curtains were pleated like the folds of the space time that so thoroughly preoccupies us,
Unless we are concerned with things other than tea, shoes, or umbrellas, things beyond
The fire and smoke and mirrors of this world. I could tell you were there.
You may have had a toothache, I thought, not knowing you had given up.
It was strange in retrospect to say that the closed door of your wry smile had been
Happening while you were thinking not of going on, but of the elegy
You would pen, translating loneliness into another form of loneliness.
I know how you feel, now, since I have also thought those things, almost,
But decided that coping was best, because then again I get to feel
The first snow brush a whisper across my face. I get to breathe
And turn on lamps to read books, to sip hot chocolate,
To answer the phone to say hello to the friend on the other end.
I get to think of life and keep on keeping on,
Thinking of those who are with us, and those who are not.
That there is a threshold, and you thought it was better to cross it, sooner rather than waiting
To see what other games of hide and seek we could play
With each other, God, ourselves, and meaning.
I peered into my teacup as if I were looking into a crystal ball,
Hoping to understand what might help. You've got to take it lightly,
I should have said,
Sometimes, say it's all just a trick of the light, egoless, in the beauty
Of the flutter of a pigeon's wings
In some scene in a novel we write as we live the book of our lives.
I am a writer, too, I would have said but then I didn't know you wrote.
I never really knew you, and that is sad that a world vanished without affirming
This way that we all trip and get up and stumble on.
Coffee mugs, stereo systems, bottle of wine—these set the scene
That matters, that has to matter to us—we have no other choice
But to make the clouds, the arrangement of chairs, the music collection matter.
It's a puzzle we must piece together, or else we are blown apart
In a world without gravity that pulls us in every direction, floating, lost.
The way we make it matter is simply to believe, and tell ourselves we do.