

Wilderness House Literary Review 6/1

Gary Moshimer
Model

My husband was a hunk in college, a lineman. When he was hurt he settled for photography, sports at first, then moving to cheerleaders, swim-suit models. He grew fat. He had a heart attack on top of a model. What kind of a girl would let him on top, I don't know. I guess a flat one, scarred for life now, because he died on her.

Models came to the funeral, but none stood out as devastated. I whipped out my camera. My brother-in-law objected, but I was on a roll, circling and snapping from all angles and purring. "Yes, good. That's right. Love the camera. Love me."

In gray burial light they were black and white, all angles. I chased them to the trees. They hid, played peek-a-boo. They freed their hair and swung it around trunks. This was art.

My brother-in-law cried out. They were lowering my husband's big-boy coffin into the ground. "Start without me!" I said. "I can't stop!"

"Do you want to say some words?"

"Yes! Fuck him!"

Twittering, giggling wood nymphs they were, prancing through the forest. It was bleak in there. I used my flash. I knew a little about fill-in from my husband. I fogged the lens with breath to make a dream. They teased. The streamers of their dresses disappeared. Their skin was dark, tanned. Blue eyes glowed. Soon only the redhead was visible, pale and different. I imagined her protected by beach umbrellas, treasured. She was the one. He had a thing for redheads. I called to her, "Please. I know it's you." She was just out of reach. Thorns snagged and sliced my legs. Her blood was already there.

The forest ended. She waited by the highway, holding her shoes, spooked. Would she dive into traffic? I stood by her, our dresses tattered. "I'm sorry," she said. I took pictures of the tears ruining her face, the blood on her shins. These would be black and white for sure.

"You're so thin." I pointed to the Pancake House.

"I haven't eaten since."

"Get anything," I said. "Or everything."

She had waffles with blueberries and whipped cream, sausages like my husband's fingers, bacon and eggs and stacked toast, frothy milk, apple juice in crystal, a fat glazed donut. I watched with my own brand of hunger, took shots of her stuffing her tiny mouth. No silicone in those lips. They must have liked her natural look. I liked it. If my husband had to die on someone, I was glad it was her.

"You don't have to say anything about it," I said. "I don't care."

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She paid a cab to take us fifty miles to her condo. We walked on the beach in the gray mist. From what was left of our dresses, we made headbands. She said she was hungry again, so we walked to the market and bought everything. The checkout boy said to keep the cart – she was pretty. We laughed, struggling through sand.

My brother-in-law called. “Where the hell are you? We’re at the house.”

“I’m far away.”

“These are your affairs,” he said.

“I’m taking care of it.”

I stayed with her. She ate and ate. She was still very pretty, despite the weight. I nibbled nuts and faded away. Her breasts flattened on my chest. Her freckles were huge. I could barely breathe under her. “Thank you,” she would say. “This is who I am. I’m in love with you. I’m filling up with you.”

“Okay.” I squeaked out the words, like a dying accordion. “Love you too.”

One day she said, “Do you want to know what his last words were?”

“Sure.”

I held my breath, waiting. But soon I realized I wasn’t holding my breath. That wasn’t it at all.