

Wilderness House Literary Review 6/2

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Jarred

‘the death, then, of a beautiful woman,
is unquestionably, the most poetic topic
in the world’ — Edgar Allan Poe

(or a child)

A hell of a way to lose weight, but I envied you
your handsome husband, your antique ivory
lace, your antique ivory skin; I cannot believe
that the specimens they showed us at the lecture
last night exist, a waxed baby with blue glass eyes,

a chubby baby arm, hand gracefully dangling
an eye in a bell jar; the professor said the anatomist’s
daughter embroidered the lace after her father dyed
and injected the tissues—too crisp too white
to be six hundred years old, six hundred years,

immortal except to fire or neglect, or, mercury
spun through veins, or to lay one’s body open
streaked red and violet blue, to be a skull
pulled from the mouth of the Ganges, to be one
side of a buried jaw, to be the horse’s pelvis

stamping in our cellar pulled by reins
of great leather sinew. Reigns, like the bones
of a king in armor, like the hanged man preserved
with his rope, like the brow of a man cased
with the spear that drove through it. Damn us—

the taxidermied infant, formaldehyde (and I am back
to those fetal twin deer, swimming in their own

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sloughed skin. I think I was six. What a child
shouldn't see. No. I would not buy this beauty
by dying. Will not become ivory but gravel

and sand. Let insects and mice dance wherever you lay
me. Swallow my salt. Let ice have the rest.

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I don't remember what he was selling

but your father traveled both sides
of the Connecticut River, Vermont, and over
to New York and he had to make small
talk in all the little towns, 1930's, '40's, 50's;
you're born, I'm born, 60, your brother —

you hated the Red Socks all your life (by
then he'd settled in Queens,) you hated
them because of Harvard, your brother hated
the townies when the cousins gathered
in Revere — your dad stayed loyal, even

in sight of Yankee Stadium, and now
when he's dying, you brothers want
to give him the win — in the playoffs
your brother says, win, yes, but how
many games, and I have to laugh

at you on the phone, remembering how we got off
class to watch the playoffs in the junior high
cafeteria and how despair settled like sulfur
in a lunar eclipse, and if there was a series —
you know the stats; I wonder how

many extra days your dad's been given —
1918, he's 86 this year; you're a good
son, you haven't forgotten who taught
you how to pitch, still know how to sell
hope with a fatal diagnosis.

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He painted me with my hair pulled back

tautly from my tired and too old already
face, interns, the two of us, white-
coated; he is crisp and well defined, the stone
walls of the castle
-our apartment building-
painted in tough and gray-brown
the background on my side a wash of white
so much we never finished