

Wilderness House Literary Review 6/3

Claudia Serea
Still life with planks

We burn the bones of the evening
until only the smell is left.

My mother bends and lifts onto her back
pieces of an old fence she'll use as kindling,

and carries them uphill
until she disappears under trees,

where my father waits,
axe in hand,

to chop them into pieces small enough
to fit into the stove.

Against the wooden sky,
the broken planks,

a dismembered cross,
look almost human,

the stove's mouth
looks human,

the charred chimney,
human,

my parents—
petrified.

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Woman of wind

I'll have to get used to my life without you,
wearing the same dress of pain every day.

I'll slip my hands inside its sleeves
carved not for arms, but for prayers.

I'll put my dress on without tears,
without thinking of you.

I'll wear the sky around my neck,
a scarf covering the scars.

I'll get used to my second skin of sorrow,
to the hollow of my home without walls,

my living room of grass
and open space.

I'll get used to the dull days
and null nights.

I'll wash often my skin of sky
and wear it radiant,

empty,
without birds,

nor clouds, nor dreams,
just wind.

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Why don't you come tonight?

Why don't you come to take me?
I asked death.

I left the door unlocked.

Bring your sharpest scythe,
or I can lend you a dull knife

to sharpen on
my heart's stone.

No, death said,
I won't come for you.

You'll be the one to bear
my many children,

the one to bake bread,
pick fruits, make wine,

and cook for the souls
I already took.

You'll be the one to light the candles,
shield their glowing skulls

with cupped hands,
and remember.

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Nothing here

There is nothing, nothing hidden in plain sight
behind the gray chair or in the clear blue pool.

And the rain didn't try to get to me yesterday
through the bus window,

and, today, the rose on the metal arch
doesn't say your name with its screeching voice.

There is no clue in the movement of wind
or in the warm flakes of light.

The cold water around my knees
isn't telling me anything with its slurred speech.

The heat of the sun falls evenly mute
on my skin and on weeds.

The trees point upward,
but not to a secret path only the birds can see.

There is no hidden meaning
in the way the ferns unfurl.

The drop of sweat clings and falls.
The fly flies.

You're not here.
There's no meaning at all.

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The greatest city on earth

1.

Alive, it stalks us
with glowing windows.

We are the prey,
the fresh blood,
the flesh.

The greatest city on earth
breathes heavily through manholes,
exhales the smell of sweat and piss
and rotten lard.

It holds us prisoners,
even our reflections,
prisoners in panes of glass,

our better versions,
thinner, younger,

hearts full of hope
and heads full of dreams.

2.

We are its children,
brave and defeated.

The city loves us,
holds us tight
in a deadly embrace,

and we love it right back,

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We love you, Mama,
your claws, your mane,
your thirsty fangs.

3.

Why sit
when you can walk?

Why walk
when you can run?

Run, run,
to the beat of drums,

faster and faster,
rumble and rush,
and trample over others.

Rush rush rush rush
rush rush rush rush

We march through the streets every day,
a flood of faceless gray.

4.

And everything we build
is ruined at night.

We build it again the next day,
and again it falls apart.

We build it, build, build,
and it's ruined again.

Higher and higher,

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then low.

And we know
the towers won't stand

until we build our love inside the walls,
our most precious love,

buried alive
inside these walls.

5.
Without fresh blood,
the construction workers will leave.

Without the work of immigrants,
the restaurants will close.

There will be fortresses of garbage,
and rats dressed as soldiers will ask
for ID at every corner.

The greatest city on earth will crumble,
first around the edges along Battery Park.

Bricks will fall; glass will fly,
and the Lincoln Tunnel will gape
a cracked mouth.

Wind will blow the last pages written
about the greatest city on earth.

Dusk will draw a dark curtain
over deserted Times Square,
and the end of time will drift

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from the blind neon signs.

6.

I won't let that happen to you,
beautiful, carnivorous city.

Start spreading the news.

Here I come, sweet New York.
Here's fresh marrow to suck.

Take my life and bury it
inside your towers,

and bloom on top of the rock
a vivid flower.

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Lilac, bridal wreath, viburnum

The air in the room turned blue,
and I wanted to sip blooms from your lips.

Lilac, bridal wreath, viburnum
branches and leaves.

Your hands startled
two quiet birds in my breasts,

and your mouth looked for hidden nests
behind my knees.

In my hair, your breath
was a grove after rain,

and I wanted,
I wanted you to stay.

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