

Wilderness House Literary Review 6/4

CL Bledsoe

The Ache of Autumn

I dreamed my heart melted out of my pores
as coffee, and everyone I knew drank it away.
As long as I keep an unfinished puzzle on the table
and a mess in the sink, I'll never die. Dust collects
on all our shoes except one pair each. You've been
sleeping in the guest bedroom so long you haven't noticed
I don't snore anymore. The cabinets downstairs
are full of clothes I've ruined and hidden.

You dreamed bears stole our recycling and woke afraid
you were racist. You forgot my birthday, and I was afraid
to tell you because I forgot it too. We couldn't afford
a new kitchen so we just cleaned. We can't sleep,
so we rent TV shows. The baby sleeps. The baby doesn't
sleep. I dream of rivers, tall trees bending in winds, vaginas
settling onto me like gloves. I saw the checkout boy looking
at your tits and thought, good for you.

I miss going to the grocery store by myself so I could sneak
candy bars. I miss long bathroom sessions. I'm pale
and weak in the light. You've gotten more vivid with age.
At least we're both still allergic to spring. We see an old man
help his wife to the car. I mimic opening your door,
and you punch me in the stomach.

We make love until you get a text message. Then I throw
your phone out the window. Spring doesn't last. Summer
drags until the ache of Autumn.

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Not Even the French Laugh at Me

I never wanted to be the man farting
in the basement, so fat bending over

winds him. Idiosyncrasies depreciate
with age. Masturbation dulls when

you realize women my age pee when
they laugh, and the young are so

young. Remember: I stopped smoking
for you, learned the secret of language

and put on pants. Once, I ate murder
for lunch because I skipped breakfast,

spoke in riddles only the elect understood.
Now, I can barely handle tomatoes.

But the basement is warm and full
of comfortable things. I don't need

to see what isn't being used anymore.
I can open a window to help with the smell.

It's too loud upstairs and they don't
allow beer. In the dark, I forget and remember.

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The Ghosts are Sharpening Their Knives Again

They have mouths but no teeth, and so must drink our blood through straws, the bendy kind. They'll make smoothies from our souls with cranberry juice. The question is how do they hold the blades with non-corporeal hands? The question is what have they done and how do I avoid it?

But perhaps they aren't ghosts; perhaps, it's the neighbors picking their teeth with the claws of 'goodwill.' They're creeping up the stairs to ask for their Tupperware back. They know you've glanced at their daughters through the bathroom window. They know you've seen their wives at the pool, drooling in their sleep. They intend to ask the difficult questions, such as: Can you recommend a good dentist? Who does your taxes? Who was that woman we saw leaving the other morning at 2 a.m. while your wife was out of town? Why do your eyes never smile when you talk to us? Does the pain ever fade, or will the wind always be a razor to our hearts?

That tickle on your neck smells of almonds. The tight leg-muscles of youth won't carry you beyond the reach of their gaping maws. Tell them: we do our own taxes. We go to the closest dentist we could find. That woman was my sister. We don't smile because we take you seriously. The wind cannot control you unless you let her. Say: we're having a barbeque. You're invited. Bring your daughter. My sister will be there. She's been dead for thirty years, but she'll bring egg salad.

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The Xenophobe's Lament

1

Consider the survival of Aeschylus' turtle
and yet only six or seven of his plays, the fig
eating donkey remembered better than the laughing
Stoic. The pretty girl who is only a picture.

Frank Wills taught us accountability but couldn't
pay his light bill. Tycho's dwarf under the table.
It cannot be avoided that Albert Schweitzer
is a cat person. Einstein weeping in the park
over spilled ice cream while his wife packed
her bags and his mistress prepared to move in.

The recluse in his cabin also wrote a book. Clinton
wore briefs and played saxophone, among other
things. Of what value is the non-trivial? Tesla
never got his Nobel, but Edison got his lightbulb.
Harrison, likewise, perfected his clock.

2

Heroes are always the stupidest men in the room. Their tears
smell like the butter in which their noses have been cooked. The sun,
their enemy. The rain, their father of fists. The taste of wind
in their carpet-hair. Hope is in the diaphragm, not the tendons.
Hope can hear the cries of America, but he sees
nothing but baby-daddies and spinning rims. Hope can feel
the prickly-hairs of loss in his wallet, but he shall not alter course.

But heroes are also clever: consider the golden tombs
of the pharaohs, Bill Gates' electric house. If you smell smoke,
you're probably on fire. How to enslave the fools of the world?

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Words. Words. Words. The steady decline of accountability.
The apotheosis of mediocrity. OMG I am that OMG. Hope is old
and the world is all lawns to be trampled by the careless feet
of youth. But it's his world, and he hears the grass stalks' cry.

3

Time is a stone thrown into the stink of matter.
No one is writing a book about our lives. No one hears
the whistle of days as they pass through the ears;
they only taste the cold in the breeze and think of winter.
There is no time, no stone, no gray whistle, but there is
the stink. The stink is America. Ask Hope when he sobers up,

puts down the knife. And the fork. The hydrogenated oils
that lubricate the passage of days. Someday soon,
we'll be noshing on his liver. That's why we force-feed
him corn. The timeworn kernels catch in his teeth.
So he spits them out.