

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/1

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LATE AMAZON

Older, I no longer melt into wallpaper
nor hide my strength
for I have come into my own
after years of shame

When I was a child,
my mother called me Dumbo and Piano Legs.
I was never good enough
though my brother was treated like a god

I grew eight inches when I was twelve.
Mother panicked I would be seven feet tall
and studied how to stunt my growth
with surgery and male hormones

Alone in the world,
I felt huge and unloved,
had visions when anorexic
and read *Les Misérables*

It took a long time to accept the truth

For I am built like a warrior,
swimmer of channels
and can navigate rocks and waves,
backstroke a mile without stopping

Though energy bursts and fades,
I walk uphill in the rain,
breathe deep and stretch
as I keep climbing, if need be

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More comfortable with my own
large skeleton,
I can be tender with children
and dogs near my home,
not avert my eyes from strangers
where wildflowers flurry,
yellow or purple parasols
opening with grace

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APRIL, UNFOLDING

By the soft unfolding ears
of water lily magnolia,
near bending Chinese trees,

father, you would walk with me,
joy filling both of us,
black branches overhead.

If you still walked above earth,
you would be one hundred two,
still full of show tunes from South Pacific
and stories of skyscrapers
rising above Brooklyn.

What you shared long ago
about cattails and conifers
stays in my recollection

now that the shadows
of my own wounds match
these ancient trees
whose roots are strong,
unclawed by blizzard ice.

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LANDSCAPE WASHED BY FIRE

Long after our parents had gone to dust,
we enter the garden, carrying our history
of Trinidad, Paris, the West Village,
the dark-skinned men we walked with
by the Hudson or Charles,
depending on the script.

Swirled in print with turquoise jewelry,
her blue-green eyes still dazzle,
carrying their intaglio of blue porcelain,
the clarity inside a lake.
Once I followed her lead
past Indian paintbrush and sumac
through woods to a clearing
that belonged to us.

We were confidants over years
under Eisenhower, falling down
over Sputnik like a spiked rock
hurtling the sky.
The backstabbing high school girls,
bomb shelters, proms and overdoses
did not claim us.

We enter the garden, carrying our history
of Trinidad, Paris, the West Village,
walking in sunlight among dachshunds
and a rushing spring,
our photos framed by Japanese maples,
orange jasmine blossoms.
An umbrella over our heads bursts
into yellow flame.

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FIRST VOYAGE

Many died crossing the water,
struck by dysentery or typhus,
unable to swallow or sleep
after weeks on rough waves.

Rats bit holes in the grain sacks,
a barrel or two of fresh water
cracked in a storm
so that rationing fell due.

Some left their bodies
for the wavy Hereafter,
holding onto the Psalms
they could remember.

Preserve me, O God.

A few planned mutiny
though they swallowed discontent
and climbed tall rigging
to keep the sails fully open to wind
and help the ship survive
battered, unending weeks
of channels, torrents and doldrums.

Some dreamed a mermaid was the captain.
Some remembered the Spirit responsible
for ensuring the dignity of man
against bondage and taxes,

the rising spirit of all the winds
and dolphins,
blue green shores a new world
for sailors with good vision.

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SAND

You talk about a ridge of sand
where the living and the dead gather
as waves roll over the unprepared
and they drown
though others hold hands,
quick stepping the current

Going on, you tell me how the ridge
extends to infinity in both directions,
the crooked ones out of sight,
the sick or weak falling into
a whirlpool where all ends

When I dream,
I see the sand is thick,
golden spine of an ancient animal
we ride, asleep or awake
through the night.