

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/1

Paul Brook

Redolence

Foraging nocturnally,
lilies are luminaries; raspberries
are ancient pheromones.

Interlaced with thorns,
the black locust pricks my ear;
I navigate the trail set

by sharp little moons of white-tailed
deer. I can smell her earthy, blackish,
musky odor, out brambling

in the raspberries, smell her in the curled
edges of leaves, in photographs blackened
by the sun. She has lain down

too long under the wings
of crows, too long under the blacker
shadows of bur oaks. Even if all

my senses leave me save one, she will
be the fragrances in my forest, my purest
recognitions: sweet, herbal, perfumed.

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Delivery

for my wife

Father, I grieved each day.
One apple sat on the counter.
Blood smeared the wall.

You protected those days
I didn't know or recognize.
I turned around and there you were

shaking the snow from your coat.
The airport buzzed with missed
connections, bright packages.

You held me as I cried,
relieved in delivering my wrecking news
the day before Christmas.

Mother doesn't condemn you.
Certainly I don't. I love you,
my little macushla berry.

Tonight, I stand at the back door,
my new husband washing the dishes,
and missing your presence,

something unexpected happens:
on the hawthorn, a cardinal
shakes the snow from his feathers.

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Kingfisher

A scold. A flash of blue.
Minnows scatter like criminals

into alleyways of cattails.
One does not escape, rings widen,

windshield shattering on impact.
Victim carried off on a stretcher.

Within the blind, I am a bystander.
Breathless, whispering my God,

my God. The kingfisher is illumination.
a constellation of water droplets,

sheen of metal blue, crested.
Police-sharp in dress,

eye mirrored and alert.
A bonfire, couches burning.

Chased through yards and gardens.
The police officer huffing and puffing,

falling behind in the darkness.
I ran and ran, groping for a hide.

Behind a woodpile I laid
one hour, mistaken identity.

The creature squirms
trying to slide itself loose.

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Thwack. Thwack. Eyes closed,
the kingfisher smacks the fish

against the stick. Immobile.
Delirious. I am the only

witness to this carnage.

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Miter

Not quite snowflakes,
five-pointed, blurred.
Not quite blown glass
or folded paper.

Lilliputian-sized, you
are a gathering of bishops
under cathedrals of oaks.
I kneel at your feet,

not quite praying,
paralyzed by guilt.
Delicate, you lean under
the weight of dew.

In the wind, you touch
my shoulder with grace,
forgiving my absence
this fine Sunday morning.

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Bloodroot

I never knew the earth
could bleed until I met you.
Digging in the moist soil,
uncarefully, I cut the root,
salmon-colored, all sap ooze.

My longings brought us
rotting vegetation
and delineation, words
forming. I keep asking,
Are you okay? Are you?

We go on. Years tangle.
The woodcock returns.
Hunters forget. Bloodroot
flowers unroll like gauze,
their veins fuse the wounds.

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Mining Bees

Drilling a bolt hole,
a gas pocket erupts,
corrupting stability.
The mine collapses,
rock and hot metal.

Beating a hammer
against torn girders,
the survivors breathe
shallow prayers
in the methane deep.

Please forgive me,
and help me avoid
sinning again.

One mining bee
enters the opening.
No exit, it flounders
beating itself
against the walls.

Covered in yellow soot,
the bee climbs out.
A new set of workers
wait, lunch buckets
in hand, trembling.