

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/2

Jamie Lynn Heller
After sixty years

she asks each day, a little panic rising
in her scratchy voice, "Will you remember?
Will you remember?" and only his reassuring
presence, his hand gently patting her arm,
will take her back to calmly looking
out the window and softly forgetting it all.

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Box of Rocks

When he found it again, he returned
the box to her. She had forgotten
about her rocks, carefully collected
for their sparkle, or smooth coolness
until the feel of the box in her hands
tapped on her memory. She'd wanted
much more from him, but he'd
hung on to her rocks because
they belonged to

his little girl who used to play
in the shade under the oak he planted,
hold his hand, bring him pictures, and
the sound of her laughter dancing
in the house still playfully dashes
around the corners of his life.

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Castle Rock, Kansas

He climbed up through history once buried,
petrified layers of an ancient sea,
his undeterred energy conquered all
eighty feet with only his hands
and untried will as he grappled with a tower
standing against wind owned plains

while our teacher, his veins bulging
through skin settling comfortably into age
and full of a stronger vintage, waited
with his field worn boot propped on a fallen bolder,
waited for what he knew this boy would find at the top,
what would, cackling in his ear, pop his bravado,
alert him to his place in the world,

and when it was time, the man
stepped forward, slapped billows of fine chalk powder
from his faded jeans, adjusted his hat, looked straight up
at the boy clutching the top
of a precarious table,
and then calmly, soothingly,
talked him down.

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My good intention

gathered dust on the merchant copy of a receipt,
resting on the desk near the other bills,

the tip carefully calculated
a little high,
my signature a little hurried.

I remember she was surprisingly young
for us to have daughters the same age,
was cheerful and attentive
without being intrusive and we
were rushing on to somewhere else.

The receipt that should have let her know
we appreciated her
landed in my wallet by mistake
as we gathered everything and moved on,

then was transferred to the desk where I thought
I'd see it and remember to drop it by
the next time we were out, because

the credit card statement showed only
the meal and taxes, nothing for her but
my good intention on a very thin slip of paper.

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Button Jar

Grandma had a button jar,
its tin lid starting to rust, within
the brightly colored bangles were missing
somethings found or needed somethings
waiting. Some still held scraps of thread
from their last attachment, pieces
of someone's discarded day.

The ones made of bone or shell clinked
differently than the plastic ones
as they rolled into each other
while we lined them up by color or size or story
she would tell about the last shirt he wore,
a baby's gown, the dress made for a special day.

Grandma had a button jar of memory
and it kept us busy while she patched
a barbed wire snag or reinforced a seam.

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Boy

He swung a beat up plastic pail in one hand
a fish tank net in the other
as he hopped, jogged and lopped intermittently
lost in his anticipation of the creek
at the bottom of the hill and

he made me pause amidst my daily cynicism
to honor him, to give thanks
for this boy who trotting out of Mark Twain's life
to terrorize the tadpoles and minnows of today