

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/2

Kassandra Montag
Heads of marigolds

scatter across the wood floor
and my jeweled shoe
taps near them,
keeping rhythm with the gardener's
guitar. I finish
carving a smile into a pumpkin.

The syncopation brings dancing
in Delhi to my mind,
when I was seven
and cared mostly for colored scarves.

While there I passed two brightly clothed
prostitutes in cages. The gold bracelets
on their arms caught sunlight in flashes
and I found them beautiful.

I began my life on stages, hoping for the radio,
and found myself in hotels,
waking with a hornet in my head.

I despised the apron and dreamed of wearing one.
All white rabbit, I flew headfirst down so many holes
I couldn't brush the dirt off my fur, forgot
where to look for all my keys, cabinets
locked with items I didn't know I owned, or needed.

On a tour in Africa
I once watched a cheetah
sit under the clouds
as if it was waiting
for something to come.

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/2

Its posture—the thin muscles along its back
arched and tight—made me think
of the Indian women and their slack faces,
the cupid's bow of their lips sharply lined
and their eyelids limp and half shut.

My lover is a hunter.
Antlers of deer and elk
protrude from the walls,
sharp bones coming out of skin
in a moment of violence.

He wants to take me to the forest
and show me how it feels to kill
something, but I already know.

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/2

Stargazer Lily

Spilled wine has dried into the grain
of wood on your staircase. I step over it
as I listen to you draw water, smell ylang-ylang
and neroli oils before I see the claw foot tub,
and you naked, leaning against the sink,
plucking a hair from your chin. The night slipped by
between our skin, sweated like a chrome plate
held to a flame, its metal glowing, then gone, leaving

me with hunger. I sit on the velvet stool
in front of an antique desk under a gilt framed mirror
and pull my powder puff from its rhinestone box. I paint
cherry red on my lips with a brush. My husband
wouldn't smile at me in the reflection, lean down
and kiss my shoulder like you just did. He likes

me the way I am, but I don't know what that is.

Your house with crawling vines,
a canopy billowing in front, and buckets
of jasmine climbing every step,
have populated my identity.

You and your lame leg lonely as I,
our lives stretches of waiting
for that rare churning in damp grass,

that moment of wet energy.

All my time is a periphery, an edge
of our broken silences. I trace the steps
of our vigilant words, figures
that rest on the rims of your eyes.

This makes me like a woman crowded

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/2

on a train platform by so many strangers
she always feels on the verge
of being shoved to the tracks
by jostling bodies. So I remember
our passing hours as my children.
How they mustn't be taken away.

In the alley once,
you picked a stargazer lily from a crack
in the neighbor's fence.
All hands and fear, it hushed
the vegetables drying in the cellar.

Smelling of skin wet from the creek
in July and a sugar bowl
on a wooden table,
it put me in a rage
with its delicate petals so aware and honest.

Next to the fireplace you had taken
out your accordion, playing for me the songs
you learned in the circus, those tunes
spirited and indulgent as sequins.

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/2

After the Vigil Service for our Son

Fields come and leave in gasps.
Your collar was stiff from the iron
so I kept touching it.

The country church shrinks
with each field we pass,
but the multicolored stain glass
is still visible floating in the expanse
of gold and russet.

I fucked up in there three times,
that I know about:
forgetting the rosary with my fingers
stuck on the third bead, snapping
at my mother to stop clinging about my elbow,
and the way I glared at you during Our Father,
wanting to dry your tears with my shawl,
to say you don't deserve them.

Always there could be more time,
hours upon long blue hours—

or so I tell myself in order to stop thinking
of his small body in the coffin.

At home, candle wax spreads across the table,
its thick crawling, its arthritic fingers quiet.

And the moon a glowing wasp,
its venom so delicate I can only
shake from confusion.

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/2

The night is silent and the plains are still
since the wind has stopped
and balanced on an edge.

You make a pot of coffee and watch it drip,
it filling the kitchen with the scent of morning.
Dull heat spins about my fingertips.

I don't drink coffee this late,
you know that.

It's just your busyness, your need for action,
the way you watch the movement of the black
liquid, as though it will suddenly bring the dawn
in its pink flush of first breath.

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/2

Dialect

*I tell her so, but mostly
in a dialect she never understands.*

--Scott Cairns

October arrives shyly,
its cold unraveling like hair descending
on shoulders
red hair
long, not like Sylvia's.

I have slept on another woman's breasts
for six nights,
her nipples curious
fingers reaching.

I love Sylvia.

I tell her so, but mostly
in a dialect she never understands.

All of her freedom
is in the garden,
in her bending down
to stir blooming, to gently touch
the wrist of a hyacinth.

I watch her from the patio,
clouded in smoke from my cigar's taut
body, its long hello without sadness.

The inhalation feels like the cheap
gray vinyl in Margo's car
that screeches at our movements,
trying to make room for our joints
that swivel.

I want to tell Sylvia.

But if I do even the alyssum won't be back,
the irises will disappear
despite their perennial nature.

I need the sheets in both rooms.

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/2

Interruptions at noon when Margo comes
in the blouse that quivers like eyelashes,
swallow and swallow.

The tulle on each shoulder
hovers and waits,
then ripens into a liquid I bathe in.

I'm sorry is not enough.

The glassy texture of morning,
with the porcelain it lays
on Sylvia's cheek makes me think
it could be. At that gate my thoughts
become frantic children, running with uneven
steps. Sylvia's muscles do not near me,
they are lax as petals, her bones
constantly folding, and in this
voice her body says
I know.