

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/3

Joe Gianotti

Bloomington Farmers' Market

Four rows of fruits and vegetables
parked outside city hall.
Unloaded from truck backs,
SUV cabins, trunks of cars,
in crates and baskets and bins.
Straight to table. A buffet of color.

It is Saturday,
or maybe Sunday.
Early and brisk,
or maybe midday and warm.
We check Eberlys,
then Beiersdorfer for apples.
I decide on a small basket,
and the woman behind the counter,
the woman who reminds me
of Lange's migrant worker,
asks if I want more sweet or more sour.
Dickson for peppers,
and you pick exactly
one red, one orange, one yellow.
Freshly baked Scholars' Inn bread.
The stoic Amish and their plump tomatoes.
A fifteen minute line for Kissinger corn,
so long that I lick the back of my teeth
and suck at the inside of my mouth.

We listen to Living Statues,
or maybe Sweetgrass,
sing in harmony,
strum guitar or pluck banjo,
play violin or fiddle.
We amble past information tables,

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staffed with activists, artists, and actors.

People come and go
from the B-line rail trail.

Children climb atop
the Bloomington Banquet,
limestone and steel table and chairs.

Leashed dogs align the perimeter,
market exiles but still happy,
tongues dangling and paws crossed.

Everyone at the market is happy.
We are happy.

We leave and go to breakfast
and eat Indonesian corn fritters,
salsa on the side.

We sit at a table for two
next to the louvered cafe doors.
I face a mirror. You face me.

Do you remember the hot pepper plant
that you bought from the elderly man
who sold nothing else? Little chili's
that clung to tiny vines as if
a puff of air could blow them away
like the seed head of a dandelion.

You kept them on your window ledge at Everman.

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Faye Dunaway, born January 14th, 1941, is an American actress

People used to tell my mother
she looked like Faye Dunaway,
and they meant the actress
of Chinatown and Network,
not the Faye Dunaway of Mommie Dearest.
My seven-year-old eyes couldn't see it then,
even though I easily see it now,
the shape of face, the curve of mouth,
the omnipresent fire
buried beneath seventy pounds of extra footage.

My mother smoked herself to diabetes,
then quit cold turkey,
then blamed the turkey for the weight.
She's moved through the therapeutic stages of Type II,
change of diet to metformin pills to insulin shots,
like Faye Dunaway through her film career,
Bonnie and Clyde to The Towering Inferno to Super Girl.

I've spent ten years acting the parent,
pleading with her to do more than a made for TV melodrama.
Her fingers stay swollen, and she waddles like a duck.
She has chronic exema on her feet,
but she still insists on leading her Joan Crawford double life,
wrathful accountant by day,
gluttonous junk food eater by night.

Her attitude hints at my grandfather's end.
In a body wracked by emphysema,
he made like Faye's Condor abductor,
and sneaked off to our backyard
to take a few last puffs from his Winstons.
He said he was going to check his garden,

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but my grandfather was no Robert Redford.
We saw through his lies,
and we wanted him to die happy.

I will learn to reconcile my mother's choices.
If she wants to mar her career by playing
Detective Rowland in the Seduction of Dr. Fuggazzi,
if she wants to lounge all day in her pajamas and Crocs,
I will let her die happy.

Somewhere, deep down in one of the atriums,
I will always hope that she has
one last Academy Award performance in her,
the role of the good patient at an endocrinologist's office,
but I'm braced for the Razzie.

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Washerwoman

Shirts folded, fresh, crisp,
stacked in a blue plastic basket,
a look like the newly purchased.
I would hook the brow of the basket
onto the waist of my pants and belt,
and balance it on my hip,
as I struggled out her skinny doorway,
coerced more narrow by her wot not
and its made-in-Hong Kong,
dime-store, antiques.

My basket filled with clothes
that never saw the machine
before they found the tub.
She scrubbed the grass and dirt and stain
from the cuffs of my pants,
the sweat from the collars of my shirts,
the white back into my gym socks.
With forever withered hands,
a bar of lye soap,
a metal washing board,
and Depression pride,
she alchemized old into new.

She stood almost everyday in her basement,
to knead the wash, to sow the laundry.
I would often hear her deplore the dishes
or ignore the dusting,
but she never lamented the laundry.

I get dressed now in the clothes of my making.
They do not feel right.
They do not look right.

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They are not right.
I cannot plait her concentrated crease.
I cannot recreate the fastidiousness of her folds.

Already, I have found a cracked button
on the wallet side pocket of a pair of pants.
I could not fasten the clasp,
and, at age 37,
I felt surprise at the newness of this experience.

I have learned, in these long eight months,
to feel shame for ever giving her
the grass stained knees of my childhood
or the socks folded inside out from my carelessness.

One day, washerwoman,
I will again enter your home
to the sound of your work.
I will turn the doorknob
and walk through the house
and hear you in your basement
waiting for me
with a basket of laundry.