

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/4

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Protest

One cut and the hair worn since childhood
fell upon the floor
dead soft.

A spear-thistle;
her new, bald skull
refused order.

She belonged to heather
and in tail-streams
cupping frogs,

delighting
in the small, green pulse of life
between palms,

not here:
at the dark centre of reunions, separations,
starved of air.

This was a protest of love, against love
demanding
sun, rain, wilderness.

From a finger, she slid a band
placed it underfoot,
pressed down

until the stone
made the sound of a gold chestnut
cracking open.

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The Lane

Breathless, the whole way
down, skimming
fuchsia, rag-ferns,

to the road below
where an old school bus
waited;

a stream of girls,
wet hair trailing
a scent of apples

in the left-behind air,
orchards
imagined us

fetching from wells,
pitchers of silver equations,
poems, plant names.

In the evenings,
pale foreheads throbbed,
small steps

returning uphill
fell
into careless unison,

something
on those short journeys
between worlds

conjured

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sisterhood
from unshared histories,

separate blood,
incomparable desires
after summer

when the lane
was high with new grass
and each girl

had her own dream
to swim
in the greenness.

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Laundry

Here in the Indian foothills,
I share a house with a man from Greece

who speaks no English perfectly,
disappears for days on a motorbike,

leaves his laundry on the low make-shift line,
grieving an absent sun.

Side by side they hang: his shirt, my summer dress
as if they know each other well

and when he returns, smelling of engine oil,
monsoon, rolled brown cigarettes,

we have no formal language
to share our separate joy.

Drip-drip on the balcony,
a queer, white pool gathers below.

He holds at a sleeve, looks to sky.
I open my palm for signs of rain.

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Hit Delete

Delete this:

the first kiss in a crowded room,
the poem that came after,
the tea-shop meeting,
the book returned months later
with a dried rose between the pages,
the booze, the stolen cigarette moments,
the party where he called me a bleached angel
and I stroked his beard,
the scarves he wrapped me in
on nights when we walked home from bars
half-drunk on each other,
always leaving something behind.
In fact, delete his whole scarf collection,
I never liked it much that a man had so many
and the lovemaking in the mornings
in a Georgian room, the awful, half moth-eaten,
fold-out bed, the green blanket,
the songs, the videos, the books,
the printed words, the said words, the dreamt words,
the day I crashed my car on the N7
thinking of his soft, tweed cuffs
and then the soup, the tea, the sympathy
– all of that too, the wedding
we didn't go to, the places that we did,
that friend of his with the red hair (whatever his name is)
all his friends, fans, foes, I was sick listening anyway
and his home-made pinhole cameras,
his firelighter flames, his lamb curries,
his ironic fascination with vampires,
delete the whole of London.