

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/1

Carol Lynn Stevenson Grellas
In the Making of Farewells

I'd like to send a prayer with the litany
of reasons my heart was broken
knowing you slept better the closer
you came to death, how you never

woke once to ask if there was anything
left unsaid. I can only think that dying
must be easier through the selfishness
of letting go. I've packed your things

in bags *return to sender* but kept them
all instead, I've hung your coats in darkness
near my Sunday best, with the rest
of what you'd call a tasteful array

of outerwear. Most days I rush
to find the warmth inside my closet—
a hurried guess of pulling something
from a room of memories suspended

on a wire, today I feel a shiver through
the dimness, the faintest scent of you
wafting past my face; the air's familiar
trace, one hallowed moment in the midst

of leaving. Still, you never said goodbye.

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After Eating Candy at the Matinee

With his mirror scoping the supple
insides of my jaw, hands finger
teeth for short fissures and soft
cracks half-broke from wear.

I'm afraid he'll hear the dawdling
leak of evening prayers and leftover
dreams of suicide that seep through
the drool of saliva and confessions to God.

Here in a dentist's chair, my throat
bared to a man in a white coat
saying open wide, I slide down
a little further in my seat wondering

if he's noted the chewed lining of my
inner cheek and the weariness
of a tongue exhausted from nightly
grinding of hope, erased through morning's

light. *Bite*, he says, and I stare into
a bright and nameless face. His jacket
dusted with the scent of everyman
and a thimbleful of Novocain for pain.

But I've lost the courage to sit through
his quiet scrutiny and I writhe from side
to side awaiting a verdict of slow death
by extraction, knowing fate gives then

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taketh away. He wheels around the room
and grabs another tool designed for probing
far below the gum line and I fear before
he's through he'll know all my secrets.

Each one hiding between some profound
crevice in my mouth. I imagine
saying *I love you* and his fingers tasting
the words. There was no other way
to tolerate such intimacy from a perfect
stranger.

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Womanizer

He was a weightless cat
that sprang from bed to cradle;
zeroing in on the hard belly
of every girl with breasts
as firm as lemons—

where no pencil kept
within a fold of skin
was fast enough to
scribble time between
the pounce from one to more—

his arrangement, door
to door of scattered leaps;
of distance meant and blueness
given, save the sanctity
of climactic bliss, a kiss
with brevity reflected

on his teeth; those lipstick
stains upon his Cheshire
grin, the only damning
proof; a public library
of where and who he'd been.