

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/1

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Easter

Spring comes with a certain cruelty.
The skies lie with their blue reaches
and naked sun. It's still cold out
and the soil in the garden is still
wet with winter rain. I am tempted
to stand in the sunlight without a coat,
but the breeze would cut straight through
me, bringing out the ache in my bones.
So I walk wrapped in leather and wool.
I smoke in the park and listen
to the birds building their glorious lives.
The neighbor's dog calls my name
every time I pass her door.
Traffic sings on the road. Easter comes
with its promise of resurrection.

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Ghosts

When I was young, I believed in the ghosts in the graveyard.

My brothers and I walked amongst the stones at night and smoked cigarettes, reading the names etched there, a life a simple dash between dates.

A creek ran along the edge of the mausoleums.

Trees grew along the gravel road.

We'd come home and lie in bed at night imagining the gray ghosts rising out of the dark ground and walking along the highway to our house.

My grandfather hung a cross over the door to keep us safe.

In the morning, after chores, my brothers and I would fish in the creek, bringing bass and crappy to the shore, enough for dinner.

I was always afraid the ghosts would take me to the edge and push me in.

God knows that ghosts are always hungry for company.

My grandfather said that we should leave a saucer of honey on the porch for the ancestors.

They never hurt those who honored them.

When he died, we laid him out in a pine box.

People came with food and condolences.

No one wept for him.

It was a quiet death.

He went to bed and sometime in the night, he simply stopped breathing.

Now, though, he was one of the spirits.

I imagined I could see his face in the window that night, his whiskers grown long and gray.

I put out the honey before going to bed, hoping that he would remember that he loved us once.

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IN A CABIN SET ON A HILL

I watched the cold frost the roots of manzanita
and yellow aspen. I watched the clouds roll over
the ridges and reach down into the valley
with thin fingers that curled
in the wind and grabbed
at the river running there. I watched an eagle hang
black over the crater of an old volcano,
huge against the sky before it dropped
and made a meal of some anonymous beast.

In a cabin set on a hill, we built fires
under stone chimneys to light days
grown cruel with winter.
When the sun dropped into the mountains,
we watched thin smoke rise to feed the clouds.

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Magic

They dance to music no one else hears and the dust rises from the field in the middle a drought.

They dance for rain and get a dervish spun up from nothing to take them into the sky.

Their shadows bend with the rhythm of drums pounding in amongst the trees.

How else is Nature called on?

How else do you communicate with the Goddess, but in her own tongue?

Night falls and they build a fire in the tall grass, dangerous and maybe foolish to risk everything on a little magic.

But then it happens.

The sky closes up and the water falls.

They sing her praises and wait for the embers to drown.

Back home, they kiss their children and pour a little wine onto the dirt floor.

This is how it works.

Magic will always come in the hour of need.

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Mountains

We have mountains here. The coast range in the west,
right before the Pacific, the Cascades to the east,
Mt. Hood, snow covered, white and black
against the pale sky. If you stand in the street,
you'll see nature's rocky walls. You can follow
the rivers to the ocean, the tide rising under the moon,
washing away the beaches, filling the estuaries
with hope.