

## Wilderness House Literary Review 8/2

*Megan Duffy*  
**Sagebrush Buttercup**

First to emerge in the Valley—April's ochre drop of Earth tilt—they drink  
robustly,  
greedy for the snowpack as it recedes into winter-stunned loams.

Leaves—mineral-dusted, basal—lick silt like cupped tongues,  
poised for warmer rain. Gluttonous blossoms, lone in their pursuit

of moisture, reign with squat, hairy blade until the sun returns  
to June height; its cinder-sky residence above the moraine.

But you have not once seen the sagebrush buttercups  
bloom, having only visited in the swarm

of July dryness, when taller, water-starved monkshood  
and paintbrush stand like firebrands in starched afternoon light.

And seeing them announced on the Park news,  
you think of all the things you have missed in this life.

How circumstance and choice have lead you one place  
while in some another,

you might have gone to Europe  
when you were twenty one

might have watched the sun set behind  
the Tivoli gardens.

Or later, a child might have grown,  
walked beside you in the sagebrush flats each July.

Now as you watch the rain that should have come in April  
saturate this city in May,

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you think of what you might have asked  
when you didn't know what to choose.

How not knowing is like imagining  
buttercups in Teton Valley,

their nectar-yellow heads bright above the skeletal-mix of soils,  
waxed to taunt the bees that are not there,

that will not arrive until long after their leaves have  
bent again into the lap of time.

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### Depth of Field

The day starts ripped  
like sheet from  
a bed in need of airing--  
Stripped for an anticipated  
guest to wake fresh,  
clean linen, neatly scented.

And the neighborhood  
looks sitcom-friendly.  
Cameras, lights hidden  
from field of vision.  
Somewhere a director shouts  
Long lens!  
Dog-walkers, runners  
little helmeted heads  
on scooters  
birds singing in the church tower.  
Iris in!  
A small boy  
stops to listen.  
He hears the robin's call,  
and a faint hint of organ  
piping from the parish hall.

His mother holds his hand

*Key grip!*

He holds hers.  
They are walking in the  
morning bloom.  
Their chestnut heads  
tinted by the  
Persimmon sun—*key light!*  
They could be

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Extras on the set,  
walking  
by the church yard.  
They could be the  
proverbial mother and child,  
headed Somewhere.  
And they are.

But the boy's brain  
requires narcotics  
and the mother  
gives them to him  
every morning.  
And each day starts  
like a ripped  
page until the small white  
beads travel down his  
throat and mingle with  
his hot, hot blood,  
reconfiguring electrical  
pathways, cleanly,  
neatly.

*Autofocus!*

Fresh, fresh  
Clarity.

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### Duck Eggs

Today the gourmet grocery displays duck eggs  
front and center in the dairy section.

Water-green rounds on pale hay.

You stop to admire their delicacy,  
wonder about their taste and how you might use  
them if you were willing to actually  
crack their mint-colored shells, to do away with their  
smoothness, their rounded existence so carefully formed  
within the hot chamber of fat and feather.

You will just look today – perhaps look up a recipe  
in case they are stocked again next week.

It is the decision to wait that makes you think of your own child,  
How he was formed with rounded head and fingertips.  
His mind unknown to you in that cushioned seat of emergence.  
How sometimes you wish he could have stayed that way  
Carefully smoothed and pink and unusable except for admiring.

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### Elephant Hosta

The mother and her son walk the laurel border.

The boy's legs longer now than they had been in November  
exposed again in basketball shorts—wet-grass blades on dry white skin.  
The boy still feels the urge to hold his mother's hand as they "check for  
sprouts" along the yard.

Their steps are careful around the bluebell beds. The garden is quiet in its  
emerging:

April air is newborn, ripped from a cloud like a sheet of drawing paper.

Sometimes, during the claustrophobic days of January, the mother had  
said things that

were impulsive and unkind. Her intolerance of the brown months—the  
branches bare in their

indifference—made her slam the bathroom door, or forget to properly  
tuck the boy into bed.

Later, she would return to his room, sorry. And he would be sorry, too, for  
growing.

For becoming an older boy who felt responsible for the sun's weakness in  
winter.

Now, the boy spots a patch of elephant hosta, dusted-blue in their matur-  
ing green way.

He bends down to their unfolding ears, listens for a sound of movement.

Weeks earlier, the hosta began their shot straight up from the brittle soil  
around the laurel. Tight funnels, abrasive in their fight against the garden  
floor.

All winter they proceeded in their religious unravel, a growing in dark-  
ness only bones can know.