

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/2

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Ansel

Ansel Adams awoke in a black and white room
He'd bled the world of color
as effectively as a 1947 Zenith console TV

He'd fallen asleep on the couch
and when he opened his eyes
the screen was static
pulsating flecks of Yosemite

Noise was white
His wife had fallen asleep
on the other side of the couch
wearing a white apron
tied tightly around her
Midwestern middle

His black and white cat
rubbed against his legs

When images become inadequate
I shall be content with silence
he said to the cat

Outside
a city bus rumbled by
accelerating loudly to make the hill

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Skin

My wife was born with a disease
that makes her look like a monster
When strangers see her they gasp
then turn red with embarrassment

but when I first turned my head to meet her
I saw only her startling blue eyes
I was deeply in love
before I noticed her scarred skin

My parents refused to attend the wedding
Their meanness
focused down on her
as if she were a microscope slide
loaded with botulism

Her condition was neither heritable
nor contagious
but my parents decided it was both
and fixated on the idea
that we would be a family of monsters
The only monster was the one inside me
the one they'd put there
that I held captive with powerful bonds

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Complexion

Is the Universe friendly, asked Einstein

Does the silence seethe with rage and
roil with violence
or does compassion hold its breath

like my grandfather's ghost
in the upstairs bedroom
of our farmhouse

the one he shared with my grandmother,
who saved my life