

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/3

Kika Dorsey

Tap Me on the Shoulder

We planted three spruces against the fence so we could
run naked to the hot tub without our neighbors seeing us.
I imagine, now that one of the trees died, that still they see
my breasts, my daughters legs like thin branches, my husband's
shoulders like scaffolding or weapons of war.

My body, what is it?

It's done what bodies do—nursed my babies sitting on hard boulders,
fucked my husband on the soft ground of a forest, laughed till my belly ached,
ran miles with the dogs and swam across a small lake.

It has sought hot water and shivered in the cold like a goose
who forgot to migrate. There are other words for *cowardice*, *shear*, for *countenance*
but none for the cool drink at the end of the day
that makes your toes warm.

I've obliterated something, perhaps the day my father flew out
of a building head-first or my mother's demise into dementia.
I've given birth despite it all to joy and I've thrown
sentences like flags waving, wondering at their hunger for God.

On my shoulder lies a baby step, a tentative moment that
is uterine and not knowing and as invisible as an eclipsed moon.
My birds sing loudly. The wishbone from our turkey lies drying.
What did you say about not thinking but feeling?
My hand on yours is sea foam. Your hand is asking, but I
have no answers. The tide pulls me in, spits me out on the sharp
granules of sand. My body is sun and a silver dollar from the
tooth fairy and my mouth is hungry with gaps where the
words spill out and then there are my shoulders that
ultimately know nothing but sky.

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Keys

The one I know is the thick one, the one that locked
her apartment in Vienna. I can't throw it away.

The others dangle from the same chain, mysteries
to me, their jagged edges like stairs.

One climbs with an angle only you could accomplish,
an overhang of craggy rock you grab to lift yourself,
to view the valley from the nose of the mountain.

You can hear our daughter play the melody of dissonance,
her orange socks punctuating the sound of orange,
of citrus memory,
sour and sweet.

My mother has lost her key.
I hold it in my hand, the weight of an egg,
of memory like a sleeping dog.
She has no memory.
She dreams in the day.

The predator always becomes the prey.
Did I say pray?

I fit into you.
You open me.

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The Killers

Two crazy people are following us.

We are in your tattered white truck and every time

I look out the window, they are there, the punky blond man with the white shirt and torn jeans, the woman in black leather and hair the color of night.

They are on the street corner, the alleyway across the street from the restaurant where we eat.

"They look like the kind of people who kill," I tell you.

I cannot eat, nerves in my belly like squirming babies, and I cannot remember the night before, whether they followed us then. I remember nothing from yesterday.

The sun is sliding like butter across the sky and we drive home on endless highway, black tongues of tar stretching, veins of them moving across the body of these plains and there they are, surrounded by prairie dogs, holding hands and staring at us while we drive, my fists clenched like stone, looking at the breathing sky, wondering how high do we have to climb to lose them as the mountains ahead render the sun useless and shallow as they swallow it whole and night returns and we can't see them anymore, those shadows of of us.

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Elegy for my Father

I've written this poem before,
how the oak coffin looked too small to contain you,
you of the hair the color of rust,
the mind of rust, broken synapses,

you of the must serve and must be aware
of creatures pursuing you, addling me.
Mud on our shoes in Tennessee where all
your relatives' gravestones can see you,

you of the crushed skull like the rattles
of angry toddlers or the soles of torn shoes.
And did your mind melt like butter into
the essence of mar's red light or did you fight

your release like the hunted elk who crashes
through the woods with an arrow in its heart.
I've written this poem before,
And now silence is the candle

I blew out for you.

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Alzheimer's Dreams

My mother's eyes have become as vacant as a newborn's
is full of dark light and hidden promise.

She has moved beyond shame,
as she fills her diapers and throws out words
as random as the cotton from our trees in the breeze.

In the warmth of her bed,
she dreams of caterpillars
and the deceased husband who jumped thirty feet
head first to escape watching her decline.

She dreams of eating dust
and how branches never get tangled
and how the moon always wanes.
She dreams of the precipitous slopes of the Hochschwab
in cold rain, and the day that forgot to happen—
the day she could recognize her grandchildren.
She dreams of worms and horses losing
their frost-bitten ears in a blizzard
and the way metal can only be transformed by fire,
her final bed.

My mother,
with the hands of an Austrian peasant
and the eyes an evening shadow.
My mother of the empty tank and journey yet ahead.
My mother the fall, worm, vacant grave,
where nothing, anymore, is saved.