

## Wilderness House Literary Review 8/3

*Valerie Westmark*

### **Somewhere a Life We Never Found**

No one slept the night border patrol  
asked if we were from California:  
Do we look like those girls?

They offered us a fag, a fag  
and chocolate, bitter:  
the way the moon hit those  
sterile white cliffs.

And just days before,  
we were in the green open  
trying to memorize the curve  
of their majestic.

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### (Unfinished) South

I've known you three ways.

Once, a home.

Sea lined gravel,

palms, the roving.

Painted houses spread,

and oak trees. Can you smell the rain?

my mother always asked.

Then, the sea

swallowed history,

white porches splattered

black, we took,

took till everyone but us

was bought and sold,

was worn. Took till we owned

the land, the sea, the air.

Now, dirt has all,

we nothing: no tribal songs,

no heart, no help.

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### Near Dusk

It was near dusk, turning  
from day to that blissful  
night or other, depending  
and he asked: do  
you feel inspired?

I tried to think of meaning, how  
I could answer a question  
so simple and cataclysmic,  
I tried to think of name, how to be.

I like to watch birds migrate I say.

**Everywhere Looks Like Somewhere Else**

Even the sea looks history,  
vaulted, too cyclical,  
takes or never gives, both  
some kind of language  
and that, too looks dead:  
native exchanged for new,  
or other, or neither, perhaps.

And if you call a rose  
by another name, is it still a rose?

But, our mountains, those  
cheaters, those are surely  
the same. I mean, earth shakes  
regardless of domination  
or victimization, again  
which one?

Or try our stories. Compare  
your Moses going  
down to Pharaoh's land,  
to emancipate; our Moses  
bringing the plague.  
Is that how it was imagined?

Maybe the shoreline, against  
that roving sea, indifferent  
maybe those are similar:  
tar-balled, soiled, black  
imposed on white or  
white needing always pristine.

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So, if you call a rose  
by another name, is it still a rose?

Yes, maybe everywhere is really somewhere  
else, misrepresented, translated.

Even our history  
looks as the sea: blank, sly, self-serving,  
a loss. I think: yours is buried,  
but mine? Never existed.