

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/2

Jacqueline Markowski

Let's Call it the Herb of Grace

(for Ophelia)

because I am the queen of taking things for granted. There are needs we have filled in tandem. Life nearly broke us, back-to-back and mirrored drama. Once, life parked us in a town too big for its britches, too small to hold the echo of childhood lurking just beneath the surface. Now, separated by region, we are axial ends of our nation. We function best in memoriam, most poetic in past tense as we speak our truth. I find you next to me in the present, riding shotgun wishes like horses when the dagger of missing is sharpest. As I jot notes on the smooth keyboard of my phone, you sit, adding to the instant poetry that still connects us. Our collection of inappropriate-for-the-occasion-hysterical-laughter is a cosmic *You're Welcome* for the dichotomy that defines us. Our shared experience, the unspoken and unspeakable, framed by the retelling and reliving, brings us common time in which we build future tense, lines we share like war stories.

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The Art of Single Meaning

I feel it, the rough spin of time,
sandpapering handprints into my
middle-aged arms. I try to embrace
the unknown, where, how will we
send our youngest to school next
year, is our oldest ready for the spin
of self-reliance. My mother's voice
hides in the chaos of the day's
electricity. *Sometimes you have*
to take the leap. It's okay not
to know. I breathe a deep Zen
chest-full, try not to apply doubt
and double meaning to
messages I might be better
off not knowing.

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Blocked by Boulder

The sun's ascension on our first Easter without
Mama is unmoved by grief. Motivation carries echo,
a blistering pail over concrete mountains, avoiding
cracks, gulping inadequate air while I mistake a keepsake
urn for a plastic egg. I try to hide it in the everyday landscape
of thirsty houseplants, cracked tea cups, dingy quilted apron
pockets. How could I mistake plastic for plaster? Empty eggs
for springtime on God's green earth? The drizzling forest
for yellow, dusty grit of southwest desert? Mirage, the nagging
dream of the dead does not nag until we are plied from it, like life
from body, Christ's ascent from a cave blocked by boulder.