

## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/3

*Nina Bennett*

**Lizzie Dean, Chipping, 1853**

A lad from the village stopped in to hoist a pint or two. She held out long  
as she could,

but when she fell it was fast and deep into a bottomless crevasse. He took  
his pleasure,

enjoyed her bronze curls, scarlet dress on the floor. Nourished by prom-  
ises, she scoured

the rooms at Sun Inn, imagined the home she would make. He cast her  
aside like potato

peelings. She put on her turquoise dress, the one he liked to unbutton.  
From the attic window

she watched him enter the church with her best friend. Slipped her head  
through the noose, kicked the chair away, danced in the winter chill as  
they came out after saying their vows.

She's buried under the elm at St. Bartholomew's, where comfrey blooms in  
November.

They step over her every Sunday when they take the little ones to church.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/3

### Sixteen Gates to Hell

She carries only her employee  
badge, clipped to her scrubs.  
Swipes it at the main entrance,  
walks down the hall to the first  
gate, swipes again, strides through  
when the steel door slides  
open with a familiar whoosh.

Repeats the process fifteen times.  
Her pace slows each moment  
the metal clangs shut behind her,  
slap of sneakers on concrete  
muffled by the cinderblock corridor.  
Harvey, the infirmary guard, unlocks the door,  
tells her the same story as yesterday,  
when he hits the lottery he'll retire  
to the Keys, run a charter boat,  
fish in the sun every day.  
She hands him the schedule, hears  
his walkie-talkie crackle as he tells  
the cell block guard to bring  
her first patient. One at a time,  
maximum security inmates  
arrive for sick call shackled,  
hand cuffed. Harvey frowns,  
taps his throat, reminds her  
to stow the stethoscope in  
her lab coat pocket.

She returns to her condo, slumps  
on the sofa with a glass of Merlot,  
falls asleep to the television.  
Dreams she wins the lottery,  
her ticket a combination

## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/3

### **This is what it sounds like**

when my mother is told  
she has metastatic pancreatic cancer.  
My sneakers squeak on the polished floor  
as I follow the doctor into her room.  
Voices from the nursing station  
swell and recede as they give morning report.  
Laughter when the resident misses a dunk shot  
with his coffee cup. Rhythmic click  
of a blood pressure monitor.  
From the next room, beep  
of an empty medication pump.  
The cart of breakfast trays rumbles  
across the unit like a coming storm.