

Wilderness House Literary Review 12/3

Crystal Hurdle

Excerpts from The Hunted Enchanters

Snare

Dad showed me the twisted wire
a snare for the Easter Bunny
he said

We would catch him
grab all the treats
eat neighbors' chocolate eggs until we burst

I wept
no treats for next year
Think of the dead bunny!

Dad spoke of rabbit stew
with gumdrop sauce
and a new fur hat

I howled
my sister grizzled in the next room
Dad bent the snare back
to coat-hanger shape

next morning
a garden-striped dress
size seven to grow into
and some tufts like tails
around the open neckline

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Family Fun

At thirty-five and forty
the sisters decide
it's time to right a wrong
several, overdue

Their father in the witness stand
every inch an executive
a family man
With icicles of fact
he brandishes false memory syndrome
grieving for his misguided daughters
their sweet gullibility

years before
hither slither
hissing
Do you want your mother to leave you?
Do you want to kill your dear old Mum?
hither slither

The wolf's in the door

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At the Exhibition: Myra Hindley's Painting

396 by 320 centimetres

acrylic on canvas

Marcus Harvey's Myra

more sophisticated

than a comic book

than Warhol's Marilyn

or Most Wanted

white, black, grey, shadows

every hair in place, meticulous

her strong brow

deep-set eyes

a faint Mona Lisa smile

our Auntie Myra

behind whose pursed lips--

the pointillist "dots"

small handprints

like those on her and "Uncle"'s fridge

remember?

thousands and thousands

I see red, vermilion

with the heat of spurting blood

a sea of splayed fingers

not mine

but yours

yours

I must remember for both of us

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Humbert's Ghost Speaks

a better generation in a safer world?

Humbert Humbert?

Dolly Schiller?

no, I'd rather she bear a boy

still, be still--

Lolita Humbert?

Had they lived

Had they existed

I can only wish

I can only long for

goodness and goodness

Insert here the name of a happy child

the name of a happy child

[Repeat till the page is full, printer]

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Replicate

Charlotte admires Dolly's clothing
the cunning halters, the floral skorts
wishes they were made in her size
wishes that people would think them sisters

Humbert admires Dolores
her lanky grace and pungent stealth
wishes his wife would reproduce in Lolita's image

Lo unto Lo unto
the infinite power

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Mrs. Richard Schiller, alias Lolita

"Mrs. 'Richard F. Schiller' died in childbed, giving birth to a stillborn girl...."

I)

Perhaps this baby
will be a boy

I'm not a misogynist

Boys have more fiber
not moral fiber
Just more fiber

I will call him Dick

II)

I hope this baby
will be twin girls
fraternal or identical
I don't care
a helpmeet for the other
built-in best friend
a saving grace, saviour

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III)

Let me not be carrying
a single daughter
someone somewhere howling for her
that could not be borne
better that she not be

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Snakes and Ladders

for Wanda, dear sister

We are sluts, playing in our housecoats
at four in the afternoon
a different game than our childhood
the board game a graph of lust
We like best the snakes' long green
but revel in the primary colors of badness

Sympathy to Love
Unity to Strength
Patience to Attainment
Direct movement up the rungs is boring, abstract

Climbing ladders gives calluses and vertigo
How better the muscular slide down
the sinuous rills

Dishonesty to Punishment
Pugnacity to Pain
Indulgence to Illness
These offer phallic masochistic thrills

Each snake's head is baleful and cunning
its stare Freudian
Snakes offer a wilder ride

The repellent yellow
and mustard orange of goodness, how ugly
The electric blue of evil
luring as the red of its consequences

This ain't no Candyland

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The Second Hand: Big Sister to Small Sister

Inquisitive. Plaintive.
But what is it in real time?
Hours carefully counted backwards
or forwards. Simple math.
three o'clock now
so two o'clock in real time.
You were a solemn child --
despite your ringlets and dimples
all silk.

And in the fall, fall back
the extra comfort of delicious bed.
But those closed-in days
dusk's descent
cutting the afternoon in two.

Today, spring forward
the puzzle of four o'clock
the light not quite right
and without the insistence
of the stomach over its ginger cookies and tea.

The shrieking jays later this morning
a jetlag dullness.
But the expanse of the evenings
will continue on and on.
Already more than thirteen hours of daylight
in real time or not.
In the cleavage of today's lost hour
that flickers throughout
I think about you
sweet sister also gone.
You were the more beautiful one.

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And the last time I saw you
I hardly remember when
you couldn't remember
how you had queried
for as much as a month
after each change.

What is it in real time?
What is it in real?

Time a great healer.

The Mother to the Empty Air

My God, that no one has come
no one will come
no rescue after all
this time
and my husband is not who I thought he was
this time it will be true, real
my head is so heavy
and I am not ready
if only I could get that hour back
turn the clock back one hour
and the pills would be shiny in their bottle still
and what will happen to my girls?

If I had that hour back
I would wear it in my hair
(I could pull it out any time
dip it in ink or dye)
feel secretive and knowing
as in early pregnancy
with my belly still taut.
Before, even seconds could
have made a difference.
Which sperm the stronger?
a boy? a second girl?
What child is this?
Whose?

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The Father

In hospital, each morphine drop
hovers for two hours.
Time is post-operative, suspended.
His leg is still on fire.
They said, painful as giving birth.

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Big Sister to Small Sister

You were affronted by the locked screen door.
Hammering. Yammering.
He was out.

The day had taken on holiday humour
by five o'clock or was it six?
And were you six or seven?
Mother and I said we didn't know you.
Whose little girl are you?
Are you a new neighbor girl?
What do you want?
The soft tortures of an hour.
It can be stretched with a fist
laid open with a probing finger.

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Daylight Savings

The frothy white blooms
already slicked with leaflime.
It's taken perhaps an hour or was it weeks
and I have missed it, am missing it.
You would have remembered in time.

Time flies when you're having fun
or dread
or grief.
The pace of a malfunctioning metronome
on speed and progesterone.

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Digital

Sister, you slide the bow faster and faster.

The violin wrestles your shrieks.

From the doorway

leaning, Father watches

hands cupping an egg timer.

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Analogue

Dinnertime. Dinnertime.

It's time to come in.

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Pendancy

And what would you do were you to have it,
retrieve all of your lost time in the world?
Would you weave it into a mohair shawl?
a soft shroud to match the feather in your hair?
Would you stride down the street, unafraid
of any man?

I would like to see
your retreating back
arcing confidence.

I should have said
should have said
opened my lips like clock hands
at twelve and four or five
but they had been sewn shut,
the second hand a needle.

The Father and the Small Sister

As one hour replaces another,
so the harvested tendon
will become ligament.
The body has its tricks.
Knee will bend in ordinariness
not astonishment.
Father's leg will become whole.

He wishes for your toddler-hood
your first baby steps
how you loved him then without reservation.
Now his shoes are like bronzed reminders
of your babyhood
or nickel-plated boots, leaden hip-waders.
Every step is something new, baby steps, tentative
and you are far away across oceans
where his day is your night.

The knee has forgotten what it will soon remember.
The brain is only tissue after all.

Relax and stretch.
Take your time.

Each hour with you
in our mother's absence
was like spun gold.

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The Father and the Small Sister, con't.

I'll give you five seconds to get over here.

One. Two. Three. Four. Five.

Okay. Ten.

It's a game of hide and seek
pinches, identifying the soft animal
that lives in his pocket
and soon an hour is eaten up
your supper a still life
cold cold on the plate.

You didn't give me time to finish.

Shrieks, sobs, the plate removed
to reappear at breakfast.

Time congeals.

Time heals all wounds.

Which is real?

My regret is
discrete savings, easily readable
only now.

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Synchronism

And I still think of you as a little girl.

I live in the past, our past.

I must set my chronometer to decades.

In my classrooms,

each student's face a tabula rasa.

A desert in which each of my footsteps

will disappear at the next breeze.

What is Clifford Olson?

What is the Challenger Explosion?

What is Tiannanmen Square?

What is?

You have disappeared in the sands of time.

My own voice has become a second language.

It is pendulous, muddy on my tongue.

Tick tock. Tick tock. Regret's a clock.

Each minute's an acrid hour.

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The Clock's Face

What time is it, Mr. Wolf?

What time is it?

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The Second Hand

But this can't be happening in real time.
Legs the narrow hands of a clock
struggling for midnight or noon
caught between Then and After.
The clock's face is blank
malevolent without the comfort of its hands.

It is too wide, too opaque, too looming to be called Now.
The present tense.
Perfect?
Simple?
Continuous Continuous
with or without each of those many hours
sucking
to the marrow
real

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Bedtime

Time for all good girls to come to bed.
Your Mama's out.
Father rests on his crutch.
His second hand holds an open bottle.
I am all ear, all eye in the other room.

I staunch my breaths.
My body is mouse quiet.
His breath is ragged
not for me, for you.

For a decade,
through the ballerina wallpaper,
the clock moans its long minutes
as my heart batters tick-tock tick-tock tick tick tick

tock

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Notes:

The Hunted Enchanters is after "The Enchanted Hunters," name of both the hotel and the play in *Lolita*. Quotations are from Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, Vintage International edition, 1989, c 1955.

The last line of "Humbert's Ghost Speaks" is from p. 6.