

**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.