

Wilderness House Literary Review 13/1

Cliff Saunders
TORCH SONG

I tell you to rely on empathy, to encourage ladybug love
on your feet while painting *yes* on the sky. I tell you

to open in April like surgical pliers, like doors
on Martha's Vineyard. Now I want to make you feel

like a Greek isle full of tombs for doomed lovers.
Now I want to make you burst with blooms of red and white!

I'm your descent into darkness—lucid, sprawling, astonishing.
Put your hand on my coat of sand and dance with me

through October until the campus dries out.
We'll synchronize our hearts to the toss of a coin.

We won't be fooled again by stars and silence.

I've been meaning to pick your vote out of a crowd

and protect you from small roots, but I'm too old
and too full of holiday sweets to make your heart

reject me. If I am crazy, then you are on fire,
but it's early. I highly recommend rappelling a tree,

singing a cappella to mating amphibians, and touching
your eyebrows with platinum candlesticks.

Meanwhile, I will bask in the silver disc of a galaxy,
with no torch down my throat for the soul to celebrate.

SPIDER IN A DROP OF WATER

*I think of love, how it should be drowned
like a spider in a drop of water.
—Maria Flook*

On dark nights it beckons
from its web of silence
with eyes open to the world.

It looks like a control freak,
a furry grim reaper with a taste
for insects. Spinning with the wind,

it's dancing on air and loving
the life of terror that made it famous.
It knows how to swoop over mailboxes

with a silky feel--ever the victim,
a priest that can't be ignored.
Now it waits by a bridge

for a little rain to fall on its web.
The spider's name needs that water
to heal itself. Brushing the final specks

of dust off its fangs, it becomes
a sad reminder of love
in the belly of a drop of water.

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APPLE SMOKE IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

Down by the bay, I hear a message
from God that sings like the rising sun,
but still I worry that no one recognizes
who I am. I am another dose of madness.

I am truly the perfect thunderstorm.
Sitting in New Hampshire, I am praying
for all mountains to be filled soon
with laptop-scented candles.

I want to be the teeth of the matter.
I want my hair to be a fierce voice.
I am not returning to the park, to the harbor
where silence is its own worst enemy.

I live and gladly die knocking over food,
quietly inching toward the hot arcade
where love blooms like a garden
of ruby-throated hummingbirds.

The seed of God braces for rain,
while a whirlwind roars like a bear
through a mile of rising anger.
I smoke abundant apples before singing

to the storm of blue mountains
and a mother's silence. As sirens wail,
I look at this strange new world
and forgive the field its derelict boats.

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PARTING SHOT

Today's the last day of my life, and in the rain, I come driving
a new car, looking for life, lucky to have Lazarus to hold me

when I succumb. Soon I will die a martyr to a mambo beat
and to memory, with its namesake sand. Soon, I am sure,

the world will fade to black and the church bells will become
disruptive. Yes, stinging nettles will be my legacy, and singers

passing through will be dancing (but not with their horses).
Before dying, I want to laugh with my brother at a seafood shack.

I want to throw dirt on dance floors so that people won't forget
what's left behind. Even in death, swollen rivers rise. Even in death,

leaves never fail to turn blue. O death, where's a little more elbow room?
Where's the tipping point? Is it somewhere over the wall of summer?