

Wilderness House Literary Review 15/4

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Caesura

You close the door, lie down, shut your eyes,
let the chatter in your head subside,

disconnecting words
from the air that bore them.

For a while, what holds sway
is the stunning singularity of the beating heart —
that self-winding thunder-clock of want,
such as it is — steadily lub-dubbing on.

Then the shift:

the take-it-slow fragmenting aurora
of all you know, as you slip down
the worn path of languor,

among voice shards, the
sibilant hedgerows (quiescence half-spelled
(spelt?)).

The mind disrobing —

as you slide into sleep.
As you avail yourself of the momentary armistice
with all that shudders and doubts
on

the front stoop of the most astonishing thing:
the mystery that gave body
to nothingness.

Ferrying

I feel the easy rock of the boat
and the shudder of the metal deck.
The steady thrum of the engine
and the prow plowing through.
Summer evening. Light breeze.
A deep emerald to clementine sky
scrubbed nearly clean of clouds.
A man reads a book in the fading light.
Another naps on a hard bench,
his head resting on a folded jacket.
A woman, alone at the railing,
coat tugged tight around her,
stares off at the sea. And I can't help
but imagine myself beside her,
her arm looped through mine,
the two of us staring in silence,
as if we had traveled a long distance
together, with a long distance to go,
as you and I once traveled
before something happened —
that look of confusion
and the slow slipping away.

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The Dead of Afternoon

Blackbirds gather on black wire
strung between creosote-soaked street poles,

momentarily free from calculating
the angle of attack, or escape.

They eye the hayfield raked by a thick wind,
study the clouds crowding the sky with innuendo —

to which they may offer soft metallic remarks.
Or not.

I'm waiting and watching through binoculars,
peering out a window on the second floor

of a small cabin on a hillside
along a dirt road, inland Maine,

far from any town. It's mid-summer.
My pencils are sharpened.

And I want so much more from the world,
it's embarrassing.

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What Now Is Was Then Tomorrow

#1

I like the "gu"
in the middle of "orangutan,"

and how many
of us say orangatang,

so at peace with our
simian slip-ups.

"Ah" the "u," add or drop the "g,"
It's fine with me.

In this way, we learn how
to forgive ourselves —

nod and smile, ease the day.
resharpen the pencil.

#2

This morning I tried to feel
the slide of time —

what morphs from
what might be into what is,

what shifts from what is
into what was —

the world of yesterday, what
had once been today,

tangling the senses with

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wants and doubts,

tightening the spirals
of boredom and joy,

salting mistakes with
a rough sketch of success,

letting all the mind-meandering
gravitate toward

the ceaseless waters of a sea
socked in permanent fog.

#3

World, I'm fine with pinning
what little we can pin.

Still, I want a new word
for stillness. For the way

we hold the enormous weight
of time's weightlessness.

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Alterity

When we meet like this to exchange the children,
there's nothing we can do but smile and report.

How are you?

Fine.

And you?

Never better.

That's good, and, oh, will you look at that gravel
over there by the back wheel of the car,
and I'm not sure I know the name of that wildflower
by the woodpile.

Tansy?

Maybe.

The heart whispers *hell*.

The heart mutters *hush*.

We used to touch so easily. We used to kiss,
sometimes delicately, sometimes in a desire to devour.
We used to feel as if we were part owners
of each other's bodies. You would slip a hand
along the small of my back whenever the mood struck.

So, now, even in the trueing light of midday,
with separate friends and pets and whittled bank accounts
to anchor us, we keep smacking into things,
dizzily and dumbfounded —

the memory of trust stored as ache,
thresholds quietly locked and abandoned,
stories of love caught in the throat.

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How strange.

That quarrel has burned, smoldered, and cooled,
Leaving only the frail, charred frame of old mistake.
In the car, the children wait. Spit-spot.