

Wilderness House Literary Review 16/1

Beate Sigriddaughter

Truth

She offered him truth once, peeled it
like an orange, held it out in sections.
He declined. It makes her shudder now.
She wants to be remembered like
a crystal or a fox on a mountain path
in the Bavarian Alps. She starts climbing
a fine line between blaming and needing
to say what wants to be said. If she won't,
it will never be told. They say the truth
will set her free, but now they also mention
if she speaks, it could hurt someone, likely
even herself. So she withdraws into silence
or hides behind words nobody understands,
veils no one can see through, billowing
with geometric shapes, elusive acrobatics.
Reality is far less noble than she likes
to admit. Nothing happens. She aches.
She wants love, colors, citrus scents,
fabrics, and shimmering things, a rose,
a book, a taste of summer. Unfortunately
she is allergic to critique and arrogance.
Sometimes she imagines if she told
the truth she might just live forever.
She knows for sure silence kills
the music that could save the world.

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Lies

Lies on the other hand are necessary
for sheer day to day survival in a place
where evil thrives without apology
and the ground is slippery with red
herrings and far too often blood as well.
It starts quite innocently with instructions
that her neighbor isn't fat, but sturdy,
and her father didn't cheat at badminton,
though it was obvious. Truth often is.
Men she falls in love with are all
figments of her own imagination, or
even someone else's. Carefully she hides
her beauty so it doesn't get mocked
with prodding daggers of discernment.
She doesn't want her heart critiqued.
She doesn't want her soul critiqued.
What good is truth when, once it's told,
the room goes quiet? She remembers
a time she almost didn't lie, but the truth
was sitting right across the dinner table,
and she already had to apologize once
before, for mentioning its oily fangs
so that the family could continue eating.
In the vicinity of bullies it is always wise
to claim it doesn't hurt, though everyone
can see the blood on the floor.
You don't mind, do you? they ask,
and she obediently responds, *no, no*,
so as not to tempt them to repeat widely
amusing taunts. It gets confusing.
Sometimes she is no longer sure
she is who she thought she was.

Corner Dreams

She sits in a well-lit corner mending broken dreams. It isn't all that difficult to find the matching threads, it takes a long time, though. At times she fears their huge intensity and the sheer pity seeing them so damaged: young girls whose confidence is broken like twigs. Society is curious: will they survive with their feet bound or high on heels? Women end up straddling the curse of always looking for approval, dodging the sharp blades hanging over them: how they have only themselves to blame. Experts crop up everywhere to tell them what they want and what they feel. Boys too get mutilated by cold hands of learned indifference. Their souls are pressed into conformity. They do not dare admit that anything might be amiss as they swagger and proudly display their smooth stumps of entitlement. Her most vivid mended dream so far is this: If only she were good enough, evil would fold its wings and simply slip away. You must forgive her for being so dissatisfied. It won't be long until new morning blushes with anticipation.