

Wilderness House Literary Review 17/1

Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg
Mystery Street

I thought it was a gravel road
lonely as a falling barn with slats
ringing in the wind
while three wild horses wait
for no one to return.

I thought its way would shine
like red glass in sunlight,
so full of darkness it would arrest me
with the clarity of direction.

I didn't want it to be a crowded street
in Calcutta with orange wings and screeching
wheels, a dead end too, while fire burned in a bin,
or for it to be a slope bundled in beige
split levels in a St. Louis suburb.

If it was a street, why not one I knew,
even if I carried such weight on my shoulders
that I missed the red door that was always there?

If it was a mystery what I carried,
why did I know where to step next?

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When I Was Half My Age

I was pregnant. This house didn't exist.
The car I drive wasn't in someone's plans yet.
I barely knew the wind-flared lake at the center
of our lives, the one that quiets enough
to show how weather and death were never crises,
just puzzles to wake out of what I thought.

Now the ones who were then not-yet-imagined
are back to sleep in their childhood beds
on worn mattresses and fresh plans. I'm outside
on a August morning when the sky turns over,
half ringed with cicadas, half edged with the upflow
of a thunderhead about to give us all the relief
that slams clean life at high speed
just before rain slows it all down again.

Wake up, I call to the ones now half my age,
look at the book the wind reads,
one syllable of sky at a time.

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Where Have You Gone?

For Jerry

Where have you gone, my little friend,
quiet in the corner of the couch, or standing
to hold me, your heart beating through mine?

Where are you hidden or hiding just now,
four months afterwards, three years later?
Are you closer or further or nowhere at all?
Is your absence a chickadee feather
in the paper litter of leaves or a raindrop
dissolving the gravel of the driveway?
Is the weather pleasant, the company entertaining,
the music a polka or waltz played on accordion?

Are you happy and out of pain?
Do you miss us, or is your mind more
like the space framed between cedar spires?
Can you fly or is the question irrelevant?

How did you go from that hospital bed, old pal?
A leaf detaching, a deer dissolving into fog,
A branch bending with no apparent breeze
or weight of bird. A trick of faith
erasing you from our lives?