

## Wilderness House Literary Review 8/2

*Laura Kiesel*

### **A Poem for Uncle**

The inseam of uncle's jacket  
matches the inseam of his coffin:  
satin, periwinkle-purple...such soft words,  
such softness inside the dense wood,  
like some tough fruit, a pineapple perhaps,  
its skin callused hard and impervious around its mushy pulp.

When the heat permeates the ground, it lasers through the oak-wood,  
sears the skin and pits out the rot, like when we eat Concord Grapes,  
our teeth splitting the skin from the flavor.

Is that what the worms do?  
Eat through the sins and leave the seeds for God?  
The bones left there idly planted in the ground to grow trees  
and believers?

My uncle's baby fine hair, combed over the bald spot.  
Covering up the bad spot.

We bury the bad things.  
We leave the worms to seed out the secrets, the bare bones,  
and leave them there for God.

We, we can't see that much, we need to keep them covert.  
In a coffin.  
We need some spirit guide to bear it away and  
so dig it deep inside the swelter of Earth.

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### Tangles

Today, we talked through the tangles, while in the yard next door,  
dust-bathing birds waged their war on biting bugs.

Tonight it will finally rain, and tomorrow  
worms will writhe in the water that collects in sidewalk creases,  
their skins the shiny pink of bloated bubblegum.

All week long I walked, though I grieved the grass never once touched my  
toes.

I watched the tree branches wave in the wind, as they always did,  
even as autumn stripped them bare of their green and winter turned them  
into a sight of gnarled hands that bade me good-bye even as I walked  
toward them.

Each year, the seasons slide by at greater speed, leaving scars that now fail  
to fade.

And at each turn, we returned to the tendrils of words that tangle us  
together—

words we share as our window displays different backdrops for the  
themes:

bright birds feeding on our old bread,

bare branches,

and a final scene of snow, that leave stencils of fern designs etched into the  
glass.

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### Nature

The beast that uses its belly to crawl, forked-tongue tasting air for hints of  
flesh

be it baby or not...

We have put our sins on him—

spit out the apple slices and tucked our own sins in the artificial skins of  
clothes,

keeping our fingernails clean when consuming our pre-packaged meat.

And then there is breakfast—

the smooth suppleness of an egg cradles the sun center of life.

Sometimes when you crack it, there are drops of blood.

It begs the question: is it food or family?

The Rhesus monkey with its mechanical mother, the dry breast

the furry fingers wrenched arthritic in the terry-cloth cover

gripping for the heartbeat, heartsick to crawl into the crux of the gene  
machine,

to be cradled in authentic arms.

Nature or nurture is the eternal argument.

Does that change whether the costume be

Scales or skin?

Feathers or fur?

And what about survival?

When a final screech is emitted in a flurry of bloody, dispersed feathers,

It reminds us all that even a nest can become a noose.

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### The Mercy of Eyelids

Sleep was the sacred break my body always wanted: to fall face down into fluffed-up pillows, to slip into a small coma that would erase the oppressive hours when the sun is too high and glares too hard and you crave dusk like a warm drink.

When my eyesight becomes blurry from my dried-out contact lenses, I close my eyes and let the tears flush out the dust, but when I open them, it's all too clear: vibrant colors smacking my eyes at every angle so that sleep again becomes a welcome thought.

And then there was you, suddenly all puffed up on the love I handed you as though you were a prized parrot or portly king.

And everything I gave you returned ten-fold: you thought of me every minute of every day you said, and I, finally finding a home in someone else's thoughts, found I could finally sleep again.

It was the sense of homelessness that kept my quaking body always awake, the untethered sensation only orphans can know, with no parents to teach them prayers or tuck them in.

It was as if my eyes had now become yours, and because I could be so much kinder to you than to myself, I let them finally close and settle into sleep, showed them the mercy I knew you'd bestow on them if you could — the mercy of eyelids.