

Wilderness House Literary Review 20/1

Nancy Mayer

Beach Scene With Figures

It's Sunday in Sheboygan at the beach.
We are lying side by side,
each self-contained and brimming
in our skin, your belly skin burned
brown, white lines where
the pleats of flesh fold in.

By noon the cumulous clouds have come.
The waves rise up and pull and fall.
Dark young hungry seagulls call.
A salmon head, a supple spine
rock in the waves' white hands.

How firm and fragile
you lie alone,
your sunstained fingers curled.
The lake could take you
bone by bone
and not disturb this world.

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Dissolution and Bequest

If I could bestow whatever
is left of my body when
it's empty,

I'd go to a river bank
in spring, when everything's
on the move, and wait
for my flesh
to resolve itself
not into dew

but mud—
the grit and slosh
of me a home now
for a peaceful family
of muskrats, a nesting place
for loons,

fertile ground for cattails
blue flag and forget-me-not,
a painless merge
this fluid season,

the stubborn bones
of me littering the shore
washed at last
into the river below,

where my skull would be
a nursery for tadpoles,
my ribcage a playground
for minnows,
the clavicle left behind,
a toy for some good dog.

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Winter Walk with Leftovers

I nearly miss the doe, dead
on blackened leaves, legs stretched
as though she'd frozen in mid-leap,
then toppled at a touch.

Her chest has been expertly excavated,
ribs licked nearly clean,
an eye, surprisingly intact,
still bright.

Next day she's
a smudge of fur,
a pile of something red,
two stiff front legs.

And then a vanishing
clean as contrails
swallowed by the sky.