

Wilderness House Literary Review 12/4

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Blood-Red on the Bay

A dead crow's nest hangs falling before the coming night, a simple silhouette to a barren land. The wind picks up and takes the nest and it drifts crazy-like above the road—so far now from that little bay of Bala, hands laid upon the water. And I am coming.

The nest breaks apart and flutters away and she walks away, slow and unsure, so beautiful, thin and broken—perfect really, for this movement, wandering and wondering, in a big world.

The wind pushing her on, and now down a narrow path between tall trees born of the coming night's broken light—most of wanting is always there, in the trees without leaves, in the wind: You can't have everything. You can't fix everything.

She stops and picks a small white spotted mushroom. She sniffs it. She puts her tongue to it. She give it back to the wet ferns, white trilliums and broken punky trees.

She walks up a small ditch back to the path, there's an old woman dressed in black walking with her head held forward pushing a wooden cart filled with assorted possessions the other way on the other side of the path. A raven rides proud on point.

She watches her walking with her heavy labored shuffle, one foot up with slow deliberation and put down again firm in front of the other.

The woman stops and looks back, go on then, whaddaya waitin for?

She walks again, the sun falling over the trees, and she stops and turns to it and tilts her head to it, her eyes closed, and she stays like this, on this path to where? That postcard. Faded. Pinned to the wall at the back of the diner. You didn't even know who sent it, they'd left before you started.

The water was so calm and clear and running on forever. The sun setting. And it was beautiful and peaceful and filled with such loneliness.

Against the building, white siding, the paint mostly faded and flaked away, the sun setting on the bay, he fucked you.

Yes.

The path comes to an end, there's a rocky craggy drop and beyond it, it is stunning. She starts down the slope, looking on, listening—there's a breeze, and she walks to it, reaching to it, the long soft grass brushing past her, the sun upon it, soft and warm, and she walks like this, in the endless valley meadow, until sometime later when she tires and stretches back to the warm grass.

I had a child.

Yes.

The child died.

She looks at the faded blue sky, and there are no clouds, none at all, and she drifts to sleep, the breeze carrying to her the remembrance of the smell of her new child.

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She wakes shaded by a big tree. A beautiful tree. Perfectly formed and reaching far above her.

She backs away, and in her mind she is unsure of the tree, questioning the very thing before her. The existence of the tree. Such a beautiful tree. She looks beyond it and there is something. She can't make it out, it's too far, the sun low and in her eyes and she begins to walk, looking back at the tree to see if it is really there. Still there. Such a thing as that.

I was working.

Your father alone with the baby.

Yes, babysitting,

A learned man. A man of words. And he is violent now in his behavior. He reads his bible: It was written I should be loyal to the nightmare of my choice, and it is you, you little slut, and he beats her. He bloodies her. Late at night drunk on the floor he quotes Conrad: And this stillness of life did not in the least resemble a peace. It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention. It looked at you with a vengeful aspect.

She comes to a caravan-type trailer, wooden with trim painted in faded bright colors, the grass up past the door, the wheels taken by the earth.

She looks around. There is no one. It's quiet.

He finished high school. You didn't.

No.

He fled Bala and he fled the the memories of you—of his fucking, and he fled too, the memory of your dead baby.

Yes, and she sits on the trailer hitch perched on a block of cracked aged oak and she leans to it, the sun falling upon her; upon her hollowing, fear chewing bones and soft tissue still, and she lifts her face to it, the warmth of it, the words within it.

I have a friend.

I know, baby.

She lives in a tree.

That's right.

I'm going to close my eyes. Did you kiss me?

Yes, baby, on your forehead.

On my forehead?

Yes, baby, on your forehead.

I love you.

I know, baby. I love you too.

Hello?

There's a man. I didn't mean to—.

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Overhear them? That's all right. He pushes back his sweat-stained straw trilby and reaches into his pocket for his cigarettes.

Where'd you come from?

He looks over his shoulder, his white shirt tucked in at the front hangs loose at the back. I live here.

You do?

Yes. He lights his cigarette and flips his lighter shut and nods towards the trailer.

She looks back at the trailer and sees the markings of faded painted letters—Circus.

He pulls a pint of whisky from his suit jacket and unscrews the top and holds it out to her.

No, thank you. You were in the circus?

Yes. He tips back the bottle. A clown. The sad one.

A sad clown?

Yes, you know, with the makeup.

You're a little girl?

She looks at the trailer.

And now another voice comes, yes, I'm a little girl, and this voice, it drifts just above the tall grass, under the fading of the light. I live in the tree.

With my friend?

No, I am your friend.

Oh, you're a little girl?

Yes, I'm a little girl.

Am I little girl?

Yes, you're a little girl too.

The sad clown places his foot on the hitch. So, you didn't tell me, where are you from?

Far away.

That doesn't help much.

Bala. What was that?

Bala?

Yes, Bala. It's a little place on a bay. Are you gonna tell me or not?

He takes another sip of whisky and looks towards the trailer.

In the tree you don't look little.

No, I'm not always little.

In my dreams I see you, and I climb you, and you hold me.

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Yes, I know.

You keep me.

Yes.

Can we play?

Yes. Come and play.

In the tree?

Yes. Come and play in the tree with me.

Forever?

Yes.

You won't make me leave?

No.

Is it warm?

Yes it is. It's warm. It's nice.

It's like we can hear her dream somehow? Is that it? Both sides of it?

He screws the lid on the bottle and puts it back in his suit jacket pocket and sits on the hitch. Either that or we are her dream. But then again, I wouldn't know, would I? I was born here. Tell me about this place, Bala? Why'd you leave?

I don't know.

He crosses his legs and lights another cigarette. You don't know?

No. Well—there was a postcard.

A postcard?

Yeah, at the back of the diner where I worked. It was old and faded and sent by someone that left before I started. On my break I'd look at it and wish I was there. All the time, actually. I'd even touch it.

He takes a drag of his cigarette, so you wanted to leave?

I guess so, although—

He drops his wrist over his crossed legs, his cigarette burning between his fingers. Yes?

Nothing.

Nothing?

No.

No? He takes another drag of his cigarette and looks at the trailer.

Baby, the lions are stuck.

The lions?

Yes, baby, the lions. I need Kashka to pull the truck out.

Kashka?

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Yes, baby, Kashka.

It's sunny.

Yes, it is. It's sunny.

It's so warm.

Yes, it's nice. You look beautiful.

Where're the midgets?

Midgets?

Yes.

Gone.

Gone?

Yes, baby, gone. In the mud.

In the mud?

Yes.

There's just the lions left?

Yes. And us.

Us?

Yes, baby. Everything else is in the mud.

And Kashka?

No, not Kashka.

Look. The lions.

Oh?

Yes, I see them.

Yes, I see them now too.

They're running and playing, like that time on the beach, do you remember? It's just them. In the meadow now, and they look so happy.

Yes, baby, they are. They're happy.

What about the truck?

It's gone now too. In the mud.

I can see the tree from here. I think I'll go see if my friend wants to come out and play. She might want to come for a ride on Kashka?

That would be nice.

Yes it would be. What will you do?

Me?

Yes.

Wait.

Wait?

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Yes, baby, wait.

For the others?

Yes, for the others. They might come back.

Did you kiss me?

No, baby, you're on Kashka.

Blow me a kiss.

There. Did you get it?

Yes, on my forehead.

Yes, baby, on your forehead.

I love you.

I know, baby, I love you too.

Where is this place?

Here?

Yes.

The end of the world, of course.

It is?

Yes.

Who are those people? And why am I here?

Perhaps to find me. Now tell me more about that night.

She looks at the last of the sun on the tall grass. I was on my break and I walked to the water's edge. It was a beautiful night and there was a warm breeze coming off the bay and the sun was setting and I wanted to hear the music.

Music?

Yes, there's a big club at the other end of the bay and Louis Armstrong was playing.

He tilts his head back and exhales, Louis Armstrong.

The bay was full, there were so many boats that night, all moored together, their varnished wood shining just above the water, the women in their long dresses and jewelry holding their high heels in one hand and their husband's arm with the other, walking barefoot over the bows of the boats. And for some reason, I wanted to feel the water. I can't remember why.

You wanted your child?

Yes, I wanted my child. I knelt down and leaned forward and put my hands to it, both palms, and it made me feel good, as if I were connected somehow to all of it, the warm breeze, the water, the boats gently swaying, the sun setting and all the happy people. And of course the music, that beautiful music that just seemed to cover us, to fold us all into one thing; into everything, and time could have stopped right there, for all I cared.

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She looks at the soft yellow light coming from the trailer window. And I can feel it still, like it'll be with me forever.

The sad clown butts his cigarette out against the side of the hitch and looks at the carevan.

You're an old woman?

Yes, I'm an old woman.

Am I an old woman?

Yes, you're an old woman too.

I've been riding this elephant.

Yes, I know.

I wanted to see if you wanted to come for a ride? I was going to ask you?

That would be nice.

You'd like to come for a ride?

Yes.

Where would you like to go?

It doesn't matter.

No?

No.

What about the tree?

It's with me.

The tree?

Yes, the tree.

Do you like being a little girl, with a tree?

Riding an elephant?

Yes, riding an elephant.

Yes.

The sad clown stands and he holds his hand out and she takes it and together they walk into the endless valley meadow, and there are no clouds, in a clear blue sky, none at all, the sun setting, blood-red on the bay above her.