

Wilderness House Literary Review 15/2

Lois Marie Harrod

Gray Day

The old woman voted extremes:
Sun for the senate, Moon for the rep.

The President said
she wasn't helping him move the tides.

The old woman said
she hadn't heard the sea in some time.

The President handed her a conch
and asked how to pronounce it:

Yea or nay? he said.
Gray, she said, gray.

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"A rift runs through every family"

Mary Ruefle

That deep gash in the Big Horn Mountains
hunters sudden came upon—

*If you don't like the way
I am doing it, do it yourself—*

or that long slow stress,
the Powder River Breaks—

*You did nothing
when you could have done . . .*

*something, fissure, fracture,
siblings never shut their nasty gapes,*

and the brother shows up or doesn't,
the wife an alcoholic,

three crevices to the breeze.
One sister referees—

*You came once, you came twice,
I came every time.*

All the disremembering, right hand
forgetting what the left hand cleaves,

If your child offends you, cut him off?
Which one was the valedictorian

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and who takes Grandpa to Vegas?
Momma gambles it won't be you.

*Careful, careful, even
the old splits ache.*

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Aunt Lucy Unruffled by the Kerfuffle

She sees a man with big teeth
and too much gum and looks away—

sky brushing into the mouth
of the sea, so much foam

washing up on shore
foot and fin, perhaps wing,

no, fake choppers, disturbing
as a crab's claw and carapace

or those plastic blossoms her neighbor wired
to his hydrangea.

She moves beyond the beach grass,
a singing maw, thinks Orpheus afloat—

lets him bolster her confidence,
holds onto striped umbrellas

squawking off with green parrots.
She's seen such things in museums

and then again in dreams.
Tell her a story and she tells yours—

just how far a bridge and dentures
can carry fangs and ivory.

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Her key, a burning corset rising
above the wedding tide, stays, lacuna—

now the flotsam
resembles a polished partial:

she looks at the shadow
where couples tongue and glaze.

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The Prodigal Keeps Calling

after Rembrandt's The Return of the Prodigal Son

Face it, when the Prodigal leaves, you are grateful,
the kid was never happy longer than the newest bling,
and with him gone, the house is peaceful, his brother
who worked so hard still working hard, offering rent.

And then the Profligate returns, acting as if he has
yet another right to your careful living, and he's angry
when you ask where his money has gone, how big
his credit card debt, has he considered bankruptcy.

You comfort yourself with the old stand-byes,
there but for the grace of the god you've not trusted
since you opened the gold-gilt book of Roman
deities, and realized that others had other beliefs,

wild and beautiful and dangerous, not that
you ever wanted a wild life, you like to tell everyone
that you would never consider divorce,
too much trouble, anguish, you remember the young

composer with the born-again-Christian mother
who believed lipstick is the grease to hell
and the uptight-autistic-genius father
who believed that music is the song of despair

and removed his support for her last year
at MIT when she switched from engineering,
his specialty, to composition. You know
about the cards handed you, how you fight

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daily to stay thin, how you know enough
of addiction and binges to imagine
what it is to get up in the middle of the night
and ransack the cupboards, the sleepwalker

whose kitchen is covered with chicken bones
in the morning, it's not as if you don't know
that the prodigal is still a part of you,
but every time he calls begging, you cringe.

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Open a Book

There's something familiar
about the first sentence.

The camel will collapse at noon.

You perch on his back
swaying in the dry heat.
and in the shimmer behind you

you hear Fern saying,
Where's Papa going with the axe?
and now you sweat

as your beast sways
towards Sharma El Sheikh
where you have a strange feeling

you have sweat before.
It was a pleasure to burn.
You finger the hot kaftans

and fake designer purses in the Old Market,
the sun shone, having no alternative, on nothing new.
and suddenly you move elsewhere—

It's a bright cold day in April,
and the clocks are striking thirteen.
You are not surprised

the next morning
when find yourself
transformed into a monstrous insect.

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It's the lexicon of Deja Vu,
certainty comes and goes.

The flying is bad,

the corpse makes it worse.

You do remember the fog,
but the landmarks below?

Call me Ishmael, no, Tithonus.

Death is your beat,

and you keep forgetting.