

## Wilderness House Literary Review 20/1

*Kate Durnan Glickman*  
**Green Little Leaves**

"But I've watered you," I say to the drooping dusty leaves. They are losing their green. I dump some fertilizer into the soil and turn on the faucet. It's true; I've kept up with the plants and the mail. Yet this is the third one that is clearly dying.

"Ah, look at that," I say. My husband is tired and barely looks up.

"What's that?"

"The fern," I say pointing. "The fern, it's okay."

The little one follows my finger. She giggles then throws her spoon.

"Did you get the good peanut butter?" He asks.

"I forgot to add it to the order, sorry."

"You didn't go to the store?"

I smooth the dish towel.

"Next time," he whispers in my ear as he picks up my plate. "And maybe, I don't know, you could get another fern?"

I'm tired lately because I take two pills instead of one now.

"How old is this prescription?" My husband had asked. "Is this right? 2018?"

"I guess so," I said. The next time his sister came over I noticed a new bottle on my nightstand. She hugged me too hard before she left. "I'll just pick up the casserole dish another time," she said. She didn't look me in the eye and then was gone.

We keep this door closed most of the time. But I find excuses to come in; mostly to put away laundry. "I am brave," the framed print above his bed says. I bought it when he first got sick and had to have all those tests. So many needles. Did it help him back then? It doesn't help me today. I look at the fraying papers taped to the walls. You can see how his stick figures evolved this last year. They have arms that lead to hands and legs that lead to semicircles of shoes.

"Why don't you go for a walk?" My mom suggests, again.

"Yea, I think I will today." I stare out the window at the dead leaves covering our lawn. They were red and orange last week. Or maybe last month. Either way, they are brown now. I listen to her breathing on the other end of the phone and picture her sitting in front of a paused television, crocheting the big blue blanket he asked for.

"Do you need any help with the party?" She asks, again. We have the same conversation most days. I think she knows I'll say I haven't picked which weekend yet.

"Well you only turn three once, you know." It was meant to be a joke, maybe, but it comes out as a threat.

"I know, yep, I know."

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At night I stare at the ceiling. I am in her room now because I just roll back and forth all night and wake him up. All I see is the bright white light of the hallway creeping under the door, the loud footsteps, the IV beeping. I hide my eyes in a book that never gets read and try to keep from sniffing as he watches TV in pain. If I do fall asleep, I lurch awake when I hear the helicopter landing on the roof. I'm relieved the machine is not beeping again, no he's sleeping and dreaming I hope while the helicopter blades chop into my chest. And I wasn't really asleep anyway, because my body knows they'll be in to take vitals soon, and I like to stand next to the nurse in case she wakes him and he's scared.

"What do you think?" My husband says in the morning.

"Coffee," I say as I wipe off the high chair.

"She was up a lot last night, huh?" he asks. The TV is too loud.

"Do you think you can pick up the cake?" I ask him.

"Of course," he sings. "Is it a good cake? I mean, like, the best possible cake? It has to be the absolute best cake, for the absolute best three-year-old!" I hear laughing over the TV.

I am trying, but I just can't sing right now. "Well, you only turn three once," I warn.

I am back at our favorite nursery. My heart is telling me to go home. I can't get out of the car, again. The helicopter blades are forever in my chest. Some nights I hear them twice. I worry about the mother whose child is in there. She wasn't as prepared as I was to be here.

I open the car door this time. I remember what my therapist said: Even shaking legs can walk. I feel my mouth dry out, my hands start to shake. My shoulders are tight. I tell myself it is more painful to look at dead plants or empty spaces where they used to be. Through the door. Get through the door.

I wonder if everyone can tell. I feel like I can't breathe. I might just stop breathing. I might just stop walking. My eyes must be wild right now. As wild as his are at 4 o'clock, when they turn on all the lights, wake him from the little rest he gets because the doctors need lab results by morning rounds. They ask me to hold him down while he screams, "No, please, no," while they try to find a good vein in his tiny little arm, while I whisper "It's okay," again and again as I comb my fingers through his sweaty hair.

He likes the cacti display at the front the best. I pick one with a fake pink flower glued to the top. I want to pick out philodendrons and pothos with rich green leaves. Hardy plants. Plants that have learned to live through everything. Learned to absorb it. All of it. Let it seep into the dirt and seeds, and wait to see what beautiful things will grow from it and what beautiful things will wither and drown. And one day I'll look around and notice we're different. We have frayed edges now, but we're darker green than before. Maybe we're even reaching our faces toward the sun again.

I see something on the first table that is good enough. Its leaves are two shades of green and some are new and little. I can come back another day;

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I just have to get to the register now. It is so far away. He loves getting new plants. Loved. He loved getting new plants. He was loved.