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Bad Harvest

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Bad Harvest

Dzvinia Orlowsky

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The Fortieth Day

called forth a night of a different kind of brilliance when the moon wrapped every thing with light—trumpeting yellow pumpkin blossoms, a water pump with a dropped handle resembling a rusty beard, an old chain saw depression at the top of a tree stump—things just outside her window that spoke with feeble or hoarse voices. A minute passed . . . then another. Old roses opened *fearless and beautiful on this day of sadness*. Since, flowers were no longer just flowers, they blurred and stretched into transparent curtains walking in the breeze of the raised storm window, walking, for those of us left behind.

Rolling

Late August, a black cat rolling in mown grass flips to its back again, then rolls to its feet, half sun-drunk, half whiplash tail. I am loved. Not. Am. I've mastered these tricks: at parties after my husband's *break a leg*, rolling an ice cube on my tongue, my eyes rolling over crowded rooms, my body buckled forward rolling over rolling words. Rolling my eyes, having blood drawn, the vial filling slowly as flood water rising. Rolling through one marriage then breaking it off, holing up, each of us rolling away into our second marriages pretending, yes, to be dead.

Let the Dead Bury the Dead

Surely she would want to hear one final song, something from the Carpathians, something folkloric about flying geese or curly hair, just to calm her nerves before he laid her to rest. Or she might ask for a glass of chilled white wine, even though he never quite learned how to pour it well, forgetting to twist the bottle, or how to sip it, gazing into her eyes. He would have to find his domino cufflinks, but first he would have to find his arms. He hadn't needed them for so long. The wind shushed through where his ribs once curled, a fat robin lodged itself in the invisible branches that spread where a human heart once beat. He'd remember not to wear his Adidas maroon three-stripe sweat suit, the one that made him sweat only if she saw him and grew angry. *This is not the way to seduce me*, her dark stormy eyes would reprimand. Should he bring a shovel? Could he bear to toss dirt on her remembering that he didn't particularly like it, the sound like heavy intermittent rain drumming on the roof of his casket, his friends staring into the burial vault, wondering what it would be like down there instead. Would she lie down quietly? He'd remember to reserve the moon. He'd ask a distracted God not to sweep too close to the stars. The tall grass would sway in the night breeze as if nothing had changed. Maybe he wouldn't need to bring his guitar, just his hands, if, he could remember where he last placed them. He hoped not to disappoint her with his cup of cracked black walnuts and a blushed apple unwrapped from a white lapel handkerchief, luring her into the next world. Any way, she was still very much alive. Night after night she stood in front of the bathroom mirror brushing back her filaments of fine hair. Why couldn't he see her there—spraying clouds of Paris Eau de Toilette in large continuous circles onto her white gauze nightgown, hear her reticent sigh.

Folding a Stranger's Laundry

You didn't tuck a quick love note
into the front pocket of his denim Levis shirt
or begin to sing *Teach Me Tonight* under your breath,
two years and counting after your divorce.
Instead you hung around the dryer pretending
to have accidentally dropped one
of what no doubt had to be
a favorite pair of socks,
the one that would suddenly appear,
a stowaway hitched onto an over-sized towel,
a turn of luck, a good omen.

You didn't find a woman's slippery
nightgown among his workout gear,
a citrus colored thong for you
to slowly peel apart from his Under Armour,
dismissing the sparks. You didn't
have to say a prayer for love to find you,
then and there, in a basement laundry room.
Prayers, you believed, were meant for bigger
things—for, as a child, remembering to sleep
with your hands above your blankets,
luminous rosary beads
woven between your fingers.

You only had to lightly tug on his torn t-shirt
for it to tumble freely out of the drum,
to imagine it, instead, as a favorite rag
with which he wiped down a saxophone,
playing a few licks and phrases,
after sunset, in his sound-proofed bedroom,
his pants, flecked with white paint,
from perhaps painting a fence. For once,
you didn't have to reinvent yourself
in the lint-colored light, the bare bulbs
and give-away magazines,
swab your lips Sax Saver red
then slip into a shiny metallic
crop top and jeans.

You just had to be there, then,
that afternoon—
no one around,
his laundry, done,
except for one last shirt you left unfolded,
sky blue,
it seemed,
opening its arms to you.

for Jay