

Wayworn Wooden Floors

by Mark Lavorato

This World

is the sprawling attic
of an abandoned building,
murmuring to its own musty heights.

Heirloom chests tucked into corners,
their tired lids clamping down
on sentimental keepsakes, worthy relics,
gradually dimming the meaning
of both.

Wayworn wooden floors lie
as if in wait for the dust to settle.
Sun melts through the windows
copper-plating the planks with tarnished
warmth; shadows of leaves swimming
over slats of maple, stretching
in spans of tongue-and-groove
that warp as slow as memory.
At night the moon heaves pools
of shadow around the room like seas.

Dried wasps coil on the windowsills,
endowed, still, with a sting
for a tidying hand.

While the weighty things that pass
over the ancient boards trail
a familiar sound, creak and bend,
like some weathered tune we're sure
we know, though can't quite remember
how it ends.

Woman Eating an Apple

Words for the lagging
November light of Sicily
always fail
but always try

It's a light that sketches
jagged lines along walls
that breathes shadow
into the blemishes
of plaster

It is a light that stretches
her lonely form across the floor
drawing her chair slanted, skeletal
mimicking her gestures
in blurry shapes
that bob between the cobblestones

It is a light that catches
the lime-green freckles
as she pares the apple
outlining the peels
like clumsy butterflies
which spill onto the plate
and dangle over its side
as if reaching out curious wings
towards the blue chequered cloth

A light that she holds her face up to
as if it were a wind
head leaning softly back
her shadow flailing out behind her
like a blowing shawl

That etches
the wrinkles of her hands
even deeper
that flashes the pink
of her open mouth
as she slips a grainy slice
between her lips

It is a light that lures her gaze

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out into the middle distance as she chews
that abandons her to her thoughts
clouds over her expression
slows the movements of her jaw

It is a light that fails
to cast a glow
on the shadow of other days
but always tries

Sorry

Accidentally,
weed whacking in the garden this morning,
I decapitated one of your prize tulips.
Its petals a lovely arteriole-red,
veined in a cartilage-yellow.

The stem was severed neatly, cleanly; the head
lay serene in a basket
of grass clippings.

I carried it into your kitchen and left it there
floating in a bowl of water on the table
(a prominent corner of your kingdom)

just to make a point.

To You, Mrs. Woolf

You woke with a start, rising too quickly from a dream
that had you crawling backwards, away from something,
knees and palms pushing at the floor,
the ceiling pressing down until your head shoved through it
like a birth, strained and grimacing, arms unfolding into a light
you never asked to be washed in.

And in blinking the film of that dream away,
the receding haze held out an offering for focus,
not a room or table or familial washbasin,
but the tightening glimmer of an autumn forest.

The bedposts pinned down the flaking skin of tree roots;
the duvet's hem draping along a tapestry of pine needles.

Breath quickened, a shallow fluttering under the sheets,
which you clutched to your mouth in fists of wrinkled fabric;
allowing the flitting of your eyes to take in a world
that wasn't your own, and so, through the spectrum
of an untainted observation, became more your own
than its frenzied inhabitants, skittering along the branches,
filled with the vacancy of preparation,
the hint of snowflakes in their nostrils
so strong it emptied their eyes.

You held to a fragile calm long enough to watch
the delicate flames of a larch's fingers, still waxy with naissance
sprouting through knuckles withered tight
from a history that uncoiled into a measureless thread,
humming in the air.

Virginia, it was as natural
as every whirling process around you
that all you should want
was to go back
to sleep.

Happiness

A true story: Found a fox once
bright coil rusting in the spring grass

looked like it'd died in its sleep
its nose drown in the fur of its tail

so I crouched down to touch the
still-glowing embers of its pelt

and with a wild and frozen start, it woke up
I will never forget the electric green

of its eyes fixed to mine, and the
rushing sense that I was looking

into something I'd been scanning for
for miles or years or fathoms

and had found at precisely the moment
I wasn't prepared to, butterfly net in the closet

My need to swallow splintered the exchange
and with two bounds of flaming grace

it slipped through a slot in the long grass
the candle flame of its tail doused
into a thin wick of shadow

Must have stayed there an hour
wondering if he'd come back

A Handful of Seeds

My father teared at movies.
His hobby though
was taking life.

He told me once, excitedly,
convincing me to try it,
having gently pulled me into a corner
where no one could hear,
that it wasn't the hunt,
or the challenge, or the meat.
It was the killing.
To take a life from this world
just because you could.

He broke his leg one September,
so couldn't scour the hills
for savage creatures.
Instead, confounded,
he whittled a branch at
the edge of the forest,
his long cast pointing at the trees.

The autumn wind
fluttered through the clinging leaves
as they slowly
lost
grip.

And gradually, tenderly,
conversely,
he befriended the birds.

He sat for days
with a handful of seeds,
waiting.
And in time, though skittish with caution,
they came. First to the table beside him,
which was only a muffled drum roll away
from the safety of the branches,
and then, edging forward with tiny hops,

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eyeing his cupped hand,
suddenly crouching, ready to fly
at the subtlest of movement.
Light feathered bodies
dainty with hollow bones,
hovering like spectators in a gallery,
wrists clasped behind backs,
scrutinizing this study of stillness,
of patience, of silence;
their shining black eyes
solemnly judging.

My father,
like the graveyard statue of a saint,
grinning at birds,
in sunlight as crisp as stone.

Later, his leg having healed,
he plucked his rifle from the corner again,
eager to tame the wild
that had come unleashed unto the world
in his absence.

Still, when I think of him,
it is this image that rises first.
A monument, honouring what he was,
but couldn't be.