Cultural Daily

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Melissa Morphew: By Their Image Shall Ye Know Them

Melissa Morphew · Thursday, June 27th, 2013

She Would Not Fear the Approaching Storm, But Share the Faith of the Sky

Everyone called her Aunt Izora, though she wasn't kin to half of them, and she wasn't as old as such a moniker might imply. But there was something about her so calm and steady, so aloof but warm, that she seemed to hold the wisdom of Methuselah, a Biblical dignity, and they all could see it in the way the blue of her eyes shifted just like the blue of the sky, the blue of some foreign ocean, the Aegean, that wine-dark sea. But this was Texas, and this was Saturday, and a storm was coming, and the day she had planned for herself, a day of sitting quietly by the pasture pond with nothing to do but imagine the clouds into rabbits or kings, had dissolved into thunder, an electricity of danger. She liked the way the wind whipped the hem of her dress and pulled at the strictness of her hair. Windblown. To be windblown, disheveled and breathless. To race against the rain, the soft drops that would grow more and more vehement, to race against the rain, and by losing, win.

Bernadette Loves the Word Susurration, the Word Wisteria, the Words Cumulus, Nimbus, and Sky

She listens to the conversation of flowers. How silent they seem. But no, Bernadette knows the petals whisper in the invisible pitch of angels, a pitch only disillusioned seamstresses can hear, those whose fingers have treadled the hems of a thousand thousand dresses, dresses whose owners use their skirts as makeshift handkerchiefs to catch their tears as they weep inconsolably. Her mother thinks she is addle-pated. "Bernadette," she says," your Grandma was crazy in the head. Thought PawPaw's ghost lived in the kitchen cupboard. Left his pipe on the top shelf for him to smoke. Loopy as a Bessie bug. Don't you wander down Grandma's road. You must understand it's awful lonely." Bernadette just shuts her ears to her mama's advice. She only wants to hear the green-voiced grasses, the grey-tinged clouds, the violet-blue wisteria. What a haunting song, not beautiful exactly, but then, she realizes there is no word–with all the words she knows, and even if she learned all the languages of the world that are and have ever been–no word exists adequate to describe such stillness, reverberating in every atom of every cell of a meadow, what ancient astronomer's called the music of the spheres, but Bernadette now realizes is the music of poppies and coreopsis and daisies and primroses and deep yellow yarrow, dandelions, cornflower, calirhoe, purslane. And she feels so, so sorry, just heartsick, for those who cannot hear this song that she hears.

Sonya Just Couldn’t Understand Why She Always Ended Up Overdressed, Out of Luck, and Stranded in the Middle of Nowhere

Sonya thought he was “the one,” the guy who would get her, who could love a gal who liked to wear gold brocade just for the heck of it, just because life was too short not to wear it whenever the notion took. The guy whose ego was strong enough to withstand a woman who read physics texts for fun, who wrote existential poetry in her dreams, who knew her way around an astrolabe and a Latin prayer book. But no, he was just another disappointment, a man who wanted to see himself in the mirror of her admiration and not bother seeing her at all–not Sonya, with her contradictions and vulnerabilities that sometimes came off as strengths. His Sonya was a drama of his own creation, and for awhile she played along, improvising a persona that would spoon into the curve of his wanting, but now she was tired of play acting, of being his “play pretty.” She no longer knew the why and the wherefore that cajoled her to negate the blue-sky that reeled inside her, the prairie meadow that stretched to infinity ecstatic with corn poppies and primroses and blue bonnets. He wasn’t worth making herself smaller, less than. He thought he was so grand. If he only knew. And how wonderful to escape, to stretch one’s legs, to walk free down a gravel road, even if it were for miles and miles and miles.

This Was the Last Time the Girls Let Nancy Pick the Location for the Baptist Women’s Auxiliary Autumn Picnic

Nancy has always been a bit of a misfit, a dreamer whose dreams don’t always translate into the day to day world. She thought the others would love the wild green of this spot, the way the trees lay jagged against the sky, how God lived in the very breeze, the smell of the dusty weeds. But the girls complained of fire ants and how the brambles caught their hems and the way no one could find a decent place to sit, even though they had brought quilts, checkered tablecloths to lay upon the ground. Their picnic baskets were loaded with Southern delicacies–fried chicken, potato salad, buttermilk pie. But no one felt like eating. Nancy had mussed it again. Nancy and her wild imagination. Nancy ignored their sullenness. She knew this was a holy place, even if the others couldn’t see it.

Cultural Weekly is proud to premiere these texts and photographs by Melissa Morphew.

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