Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

# Luke Johnson: Three Poems

Luke J. Johnson · Wednesday, October 30th, 2019

## Bee Fennel

I trapped bees in boxes
& carried them to the neighbor's blind son.

Set them loose. Praised their frantic undulations,
their search for someone to serve,

then left him, bitten, tongue partly swollen,
stomach distended & scabbed. Edit: I did not

simply set them free in the blind boy's hair. I
wooed them with candy & blew smoke through

a hole in the box until they dropped dizzy.
Plucked their stingers. Drowned the queen

& smiled as her wings folded into soda pop.
Promised the boy a taste of fennel, hot joy

thrumming his throat. He opened. Teeth
clean. Teeth like washed windows. Tasted

my kiss. Unraveled my tongue inside his.

(Originally published in *Porter Gulch Review*)

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## Rats & Manna

This poem has a house on a slipped foundation
and a woman beneath the porch
with a wrench

trying to tie down the posts. She's heavy-set
with small hands

and bites her lips until they bleed.

Above her
footsteps thud and dust swarms. She admires
the way the refraction of light comes close

and whorls when her hand moves through it.
Remembers her father preaching and pacing
the aisles between pews

while her silent mother
flipped a black bible and wrote notes,
gin on her breath. These days all it takes

is a gentle gale to shake the house.
If you're standing by the stove frying tilapia
and a storm congeals

and what follows that storm
are silk howls wrapped with rain, you'll feel
your feet wobble

as the structure cracks like ship boughs,
shifts for balance. This is a poem more
than a house. A poem about a woman

who fixes three plates for supper,
who waits patiently for the back door
to hook and close

and the house to erupt with laughter so loud
the wood shutters slap, metal sconces shake.
But there are no footsteps here,

no voices in the clearing,
no lover's hand moving the hair from her face
when she fights fever or builds a fence

or ties down the house
so, the earth won't swallow her.
This is a poem about prayer, about the loss of prayer,

about rats who nest inside walls and leave shit
lined from room to room like manna. About two plates
left like offerings, for a lover and son

she carried six months into light.

(Originally published in *American Journal of Poetry*)

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## :boys

– to Smitty, Slick Nic, Mortimer and Dave

In a barn
choked by rusty tools
and ragweed

we stood
in a riotous circle

watching
fetal mice fill
their fresh lungs with air

when Smitty
behind a tribal smile

pulled a blade
from his back pocket

and began
to slice one down the abdomen
with ball point precision

each of us stone-silent
and cold

as Smitty unsnapped
the sternum
like a bloody brassiere

then moved toward
the heart

a porous drum
swelling in his fingers.

(Originally published in the *Asheville Poetry Review*)

Author photo by Clara Johnson

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