Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Ron Koertge: Three Poems

Ron Koertge · Wednesday, March 26th, 2014

Ron Koertge (pronounced KUR-chee) writes fiction for Young Adults and poetry for everybody. The author of a dozen novels and novels-in-verse, his latest are *Lies, Knives, and Girls in Red Dresses* and *Coaltown Jesus*, both from Candlewick Press. As a poet, he has been awarded grants from the California Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts. He is also part of the Best American Poetry series (1999 and 2006). His latest books of poems are from Red Hen Press: *Fever* and *The Ogre's Wife*.

The poems have previously been published in *The Ogre's Wife* ("The Death of Hansel") and *Fever*.

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The Death of Hansel

Gretel enrolls in night school. A creative writing class.
There are other women in their fifties. One keeps pointing
her expensive breasts at the teacher. One has crazy hair
and a pentagram. They're nice enough, though.

Gretel likes to sit with the young people. The girls treat
her like a mom, spilling all kinds of secrets. Their idea
of an endearment is to give her a joint or two
in a Sucrets box.

Gretel likes the class. The teacher is bigger than she
expected, strong like a woodsman. She's sorry when
he hands out the last poem.

At home, she sits in the window seat and smokes.
The marijuana makes her sleep and before that she
feels – she learned this word recently – phantasmagorical.

The moon is either there or she knows where it is.
A forest fills her little yard. A trail of white pebbles
leads God-knows-where. She lets herself cry once
a week and this is the time.

“Oh, honey,” she says. “I miss you so much.”

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Kryptonite

Lois liked to see the bullets bounce
off Superman’s chest, and of course
she was proud when he leaned into
a locomotive and saved the crippled
orphan who had fallen on the tracks.

Yet on those long nights when he was
readjusting longitude or destroying
a meteor headed right for some nun,
Lois considered carrying just a smidgen
of kryptonite in her purse or at least
making a tincture to dab behind her ears.

She pictured his knees giving way,
the color draining from his cheeks.
He’d lie on the couch like a guy with
the flu, too weak to paint the front
porch or take out the garbage. She
could peek down his tights or draw
on his cheek with a ball point. She
might even muss his hair and slap
him around.

“Hey, what’d I do?” he’d croak just
like a regular boyfriend. At last.

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Found

My wife waits for a caterpillar
to crawl onto her palm so she
can carry it out of the street
and into the green subdivision
of a tree.

Yesterday she coaxed a spider
into a juicier corner. The day
before she hazed a snail
in a half-circle so he wouldn’t
have to crawl all the way
around the world and be 2000
years late for dinner.

I want her to hurry up and pay
attention to me or go where I
want to go until I remember
the night she found me wet
and limping, felt for a collar
and tags, then put me in
the truck where it was warm.

Without her, I wouldn’t
be standing here in these
snazzy, alligator shoes.

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