

## Wilderness House Literary Review 10/1

Mark Vogel

### **The inability to follow directions**

The goal is to spray the eyes, but if you are  
that close, you may soon be dead.

With bear spray the aim is to guide  
a pepper misted path to the head for the ten feet  
a maddened grizzly must travel to attack,  
which assumes the bear *telegraphs*  
its intentions, and the canister is exposed  
and accessible, attached to a belt,  
and that the sprayer facing a bear's musky  
presence will stand composed as the threat  
comes on strong. That a hiker has read  
and understood the anxiety producing warning:  
*You can only use this spray once*, and still act,  
despite paralysis fed by shimmering fear.

In the evening when a baby brother sends me  
to camp in the Teton woods his deliberate  
clipped language can't hide his worry  
that I will be vulnerable walking the trail,  
and that any minute, despite vigilance  
and Park Service instructions, I could be  
dragged into rough oblivion. In limitless  
Western air too much possibility lurks—  
it is clear that when cultivated trails  
peter out, overwhelmed by chaotic wild,  
research will never be sufficient, and  
no planning could see ahead lumbering threats  
oblivious to a brother's gentle suggestions.

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The directions say *wear the bear spray*  
*anytime on the trails*, as if we as a species  
know we have angered the bears so big  
and autonomous, making them sure to explode,  
then dissect. In thin transparent evening air  
full of stars deliciously more vivid than at home,  
without questioning I have given in,  
opening wide to the quiet alive, with the birds  
flitting, finding shelter in last lonely light  
before the sparkling cold rushes in.

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### **The ancient salmon swims only forward**

The old fish with round sores that led  
forever in the school, in and around/  
up/down in ocean wild, is now isolated,  
camouflaged but huge, fluttering  
in the shallows outside the main current,  
far from the big pool where  
younger tails flash in disdain. On watery  
edges predators scout the harvest  
season flow, but disdain his mottled flesh,  
his color that has paled even in  
the red core, his mossy skin that sloughs  
in ragged patches, like history rejected,  
but pared to a crucial truth. Poisoned by  
his journeys, and breathing slow,  
he is nearly back to his sacred spring head,  
though his efforts have exacted  
a toll, and he won't again swirl in the depths.  
Still, he is a meditation in startling  
beauty, with old world dignity, and no  
need to run and leap. In the coming  
and the going in water clear, relentless,  
he feels in his heart the gaggle  
of fishermen in metal boats that push  
upstream, tracing him and his  
kind back to the transparent source,  
through the trembling ever moving  
rocks, to where river becomes stream.

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Northwest mist and fog holds close  
an essence protected from the heavens—  
as grizzled men feel more  
than see the waters that flow past an  
ebbing life—as if the habits  
of their lives exist to follow the flick  
of his tail as he moves forward.

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### all you could be

From a ten year old and a camera  
the unframed always prepares to emerge,  
unedited once hidden privacy ready  
to be released as public evidence.

For the kid loves planning the new —  
in harsh light doing intrusion games,  
so, today, with a bold squeal he flings  
a shower door open to  
snap Father's raw nakedness.

Oh my, messing at catching the beast  
in the wet/eyes glisten in shock.

A kid provoked doesn't care where play  
stops and the serious begins—or how  
mature scars hide behind clothes.

Two weeks later a glossy print  
doesn't reveal run and hide play,  
a cackling primitive laugh, back and  
forth hands-on love—only cockeyed  
collage, a mauve concave chest,  
half an arm, drool on chin, a nipple  
against white tile, a shrunken penis  
shocked by harsh flash.

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Crass adolescent pornography unfit  
for bulletin board display, while  
at the edges a gawky kid as tormentor  
hangs close, energized,  
gauging reaction, proud he has bagged  
the big beast, ready to tune the story,  
as he notes grizzled resignation to  
incremental exposure/  
everyday flattened truth that promises  
to harden and wrinkle, to show what  
cannot be loved. Orange/green/

pink fog clusters like a habit round  
pale skin/the twisted edge of a smile/  
lips alive as just right fragmented art  
found, the bizarre captured.