

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/2

Tom Sheehan

Kid Brother Charlie, Astronaut

This star reconnaissance began on the fourth of July, the quick morning soft as a fresh bun, as warm, air floating up the stairs and coming across my bed in the smell of burnt cork or punk as smoky as a compost pile rising upwards from gutter and lawn debris the night had collected, the spent rockets askew in gutters throughout the town, their clutter of half-burnt paper and tail sticks

once also afire in the night sky, those signals giving to darkness new dimension of light and sound and explosion of circular flares oft too bright to look at, as if the sun had delayed its departure for the heart of our celebration, as if stars had loosed their final demise amid or against the spatial junk they might encounter in those outer reaches, friction of them in the distance measured silent as Indians

past days on these fields and paths at flint and rock, even children younger than me went secretly about the ways and quietest roads and padded lawns collecting now-expended shafts of excitement, rolling them into fisted quivers of their hands, tightly against their noses smelling residue of them, the dross and dregs of sky-reaching powder that short fires had implanted on thin shanks black as night,

so that when fully amassed in a child's hand a match was re-applied in secret and gut blaze of celebrations began anew for those without money to buy their own pyrotechnics, blue-red and orange-green flames loosed by this competition excelling much observed on the holiday eve, these young scavengers, that young army of excitement seekers like fresh winds adrift at dawn, my younger brother Charlie also an aimless

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and directed searcher of ignited celebration goods; marked the whole way across vast lawns, where flags were left hanging out all night, by red hair and fiery eyes, even before the falsity of the dawn flash, his nimble legs in drive gear and nimble fingers at the bundled grasp of sticks awaiting new flame; he, young Charlie, who was long ago appointed to the same bedroom as I, the choice between us as one who would decorate walls

with Neil Armstrong's little dance down the ladder of time there across the tempest tide of the skies and the blur of our black and white television set, this younger brother of mine who dreamed and reached for the stilted aerodynamics of lads, who exaggerated his heart and mind for the unseen, the unknown, that far pit of darkness the skies offer to imagination's leap for the wonder of endless contact, sweet abrasions upon universe's parts,

the coming global wanderer, aeronaut and astronaut and star traveler now out of tight innards of a small bedroom Neil Armstrong carried on his back, the fiery-eyed, dreamy, resolute celestial kid brother now in endless orbit and sending me these late signals from a far turn of the once-dark universe whose reception began in simple ignition within fisted hand like wondrous boosters for a tell-tale heart, who now makes no sudden moves above Earth.