

## Wilderness House Literary Review 10/3

*Mark Trechock*

### **A Photograph of My Father after the War**

Sitting behind a T-bone and a seven-and-seven,  
my father's position—flanked by the company of  
sisters-in-law, my mother, and the cut-off cuff and shoe  
of a waiter marching hurriedly toward the kitchen—  
is exposed by the smoke and light  
of celebratory cigarettes and Chinese lanterns.

He looks uneasy in the new and desperate peacetime,  
effected at the end by the ultimate flamethrower,  
burning up thousands, whereupon he could go home.  
Yet a single Japanese sniper skull—  
like the one in the photo he showed me  
late one Friday night when the rest  
of the household slept—was enough  
to obliterate every single holy word  
about God's righteousness from his Catholic catechism.

All that he still believed was to be kind.  
So he taught me to do my mother's sometimes  
pointless but always harmless errands without complaint,  
to carve a turkey, to wash dishes, to shingle a roof,  
to work hard at a job but expect no compliments,  
yet to stand with your fellow workers to demand a raise,  
health insurance and days off, and to strike if needed,  
to vote for McGovern to end the killing and  
dying and loss of limb and faith in another jungle,  
and finally, never to take a good meal for granted.  
Thank the cook, tip the waiter, and just in case,  
learn to cook for yourself.

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### Here's Mud in Your Eye

My father would sometimes push  
his wheelbarrow laden with mortar  
up to the sophomore story of a college,  
maybe like the one that offered to him  
the football scholarship he turned down  
to support his widowed mother,

Or maybe to the fourth story of a hospital  
where his own father— who mined bituminous  
so the new world would be heated up—  
might have died of black lung disease,  
instead of at home surrounded by sons  
destined also for the shaft,

Or maybe my father tended the bricklayer  
who decorated the flagpole base  
at a suburban grade school now closed,  
the American dream having led  
to quests for more distant suburbs.

After the labor of the day  
my father would often stop for a glass,  
or maybe two, but never three,  
at the beer joint two blocks away,  
where the trolley tracks were torn up  
in favor of high-finned Dodges,

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And then come home for supper,  
put down his lunch bucket,  
open the fridge, take up a spoon,  
then bury it in a jar of horseradish,  
taste the bitterness of Adam's first meal  
outside the garden gate,  
and make a face that suggested  
a kind of satisfied disappointment.

**What We Remembered**

The last time I saw my aunt Vivienne—  
the one with Susquehannock blood  
on her mother's mother's side  
and cold water flat Irish on her dad's—  
she was still living in the banker's house  
that she and her second husband bought  
in the town where the iron ore  
played out decades ago.

She took my arm and said let's get some lunch  
at the Pastime Grill, they know me there.  
We walked the two blocks in slow motion,  
a conversation of memories bouncing around  
like a punted football.  
It was autumn.

She had forgotten my wife's name  
and the town I lived in and what I did for a living,  
but she remembered her father-in-law,  
Ragnvold, and how I sat on his lap and ate blue cheese  
when I was two years old, and my mother's  
vibrant mezzo soprano, and my father  
climbing an elm tree to rescue  
a rubber ball, and the depression  
of her first husband, drafted  
then transferred from stateside camp to camp,  
too healthy to be discharged,  
too flat-footed to march through Italy, and the names  
and prices of all the French wines she carried,  
and what shelf they belonged on,  
back when she ran that liquor store  
in what used to be the suburbs.

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And I remembered the homemade mince pie  
I wouldn't eat, and the pumpkin that I would,  
and how she drank tea, not coffee,  
after the Thanksgiving dinners she prepared  
every year until she couldn't, and how she laughed  
at herself as only an in-law can laugh,  
as if to say, "How did I end up here  
of all places?"

Aunt Vivienne crawled into the booth  
like a toddler into her mother's arms.  
The waiter came to greet her,  
in his hands an ice bucket  
and a bottle of white wine.  
"Your favorite, madame," he said.  
"Vouvray!" she exclaimed, clapping her hands.  
"It belongs on the top shelf, far left,  
next to the white Bordeaux."

**The Real Presence**

In a room of right angles,  
which prevented relaxation,  
wrapped in plumes of antique dust,  
which suggested asphyxiation,

we would debate the theories:  
bread or body; wine or blood;  
present, absent or pretend;  
linked by something like the cloud?

The magic trick analogy  
felt as if a coin were fished  
out from behind my ear by Santa  
just so I could get my wish.

Calling it symbol—as though one cleared  
one's throat and raised a glass to say,  
"To good old Jesus, it's too bad  
he couldn't be here with us today."

Yet the thought a little Liebfraumilch,  
here in the company of fast friends,  
could double as the end of evil  
sets my much-scratched hair on end.