

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/4

D.E. Kern

Some 2,100 miles

Awakened by a kiss to the thin lip
of a fogged-in cup, I breath in the scent
lent by new beginnings and grab
a plastic lid. I hoist my bag across
my shoulders, claim a piece of bench
and eye the stainless tracks from which

I steal my strength. Beyond lies the bay,
and old Jack's wraith is among the things
I take at faith as gulls break the concrete
cover, stutter, and play the role of checkmarks,
punctuating the text of whatever illumination
manages to filter through. With them I stretch

my arms like some dim supplicant and snatch
a well-worn book from a tidy pile that accounts
for nearly all my things: a week's worth
of clothes, books, and journals filled with rough
drafts of dreams. I plan to create luck, pursue
the challenge that threads its way through change.

So I join the queue when I hear the growl in the
ground, the strong rush of air ploughed ahead
by our passage and smile at all we have in common.
Like livestock, we are ushered to stalls for two,
and by Davis the common scent of life blossoms,
our bodies more than touched with a hint of June.

We climb with the heat; the oaks give way to pines
and shards of gneiss. The tangled waters share a glint
and leap off granite monuments like schoolboys
thrilled by the permanent thaw. The lake reflects
the sky, and I struggle for balance here upon
the shoulders of George Donner. Soon the desert

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/4

will wear the twilight, fiery and thin, like a lady
in peignoir slipping off to her room. We make
a stop in Reno for fresh air and smokes. I pull
a toothbrush and a T-shirt out a bag, followed
by my copy of Catch-22. I lean against a window
and wait for the sky to blur into black.

As first light rises, brilliance forces my eyes
to flutter like the wings on a crow incapable
of leaving its darkness behind. It flies through
this canyon as old as Job, a canvas for the
uninterrupted wind with sandstone streaked
an Earth's tones worth of indifference.

We lurch through a Green River town just six
doors strong and lacking foundations. Three
men in hip-high water make the casts I use
to mark time as I peel the plastic skin off breakfast.
Light on liquid shatters and throws shimmering
shrapnel across my lap. Next to sting is the woman

who slips beside me south of Dinosaur and nestles
in my arms like the Colorado in its cut, her blue eyes
the perfect ocean for a red-rock afternoon—the
tactile pleasures of denim, lace, and breasts along
with the shameless laugh as eyelashes flutter against
my cheek. In Glenwood Springs, she finds the spot

where Doc died in spite of his name. I cough my
request near Divide, and she spreads her legs despite
holding tight to her heart. The rafts go past, a parade
of the equally ill-behaved. Crumbled slate manages
to support the random Aspen, and the foothills grow
thick with development in the descent to Denver,

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/4

where trains dance slowly in their yard. The slivered sun squats between two peaks like a ruby, hesitating at the thought of yielding its job to the moon. Soon the meadow grasses will bend, their joints taxed, their silver heads flashing like an army of the aged. Then heat lighting will rend the inked sky as I press against

the window and fight both the glare and my distorted face to get a better view of the maple and sycamore border that holds back a congregation of sweet corn. The porter hangs a strip of paper on the overhead to mark what's now an empty seat and says, "We're pulling into Omaha." I ask, "How long to Chicago?"

But I already know there's no use in fighting sleep with ten hours to roll in this diesel-powered cradle, so I sway in one of the tinny hands of my motherland and pray to be delivered to sunlight and sod. Lord, make it the solid sort of place where I can tangle my roots around a broad set of shoulders.

The Swim of Things

Between pulls, the surge returns my arms to avian pose, and I ponder the likelihood of the kite—sailing effortlessly as youth—considering us mirrors. And I confess it is probably a case of who noticed whom, the predator so flawless I take him for a small jet at first blush, or the middle-aged man sputtering at the finish of each sporadic stroke.

Breaking water, a river rolls from shoulders to toes, and I shudder as I recall currents, stealing the sand from beneath my feet. So it seems best bet is the bird, who handles 4,000 feet like young love—expecting breathlessness—not with one laid flat by fate, shedding a tear for each drop of water, slipping through his cupped and too-human hands.

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/4

Walking Man

A stylus of morning light chisels into day and brightens the underside
of Sycamore
leaves, their skirts lifted by the breeze. I twist the blinds, let it in, pack
my bags
with my notes and pens. I dress to kill time, drink black coffee, then
slide out
the back door in an ode to modern dance.

Outside I am a part of everything: the exhaust from an idling truck,
earth rattled
by low-flying planes, the scent of lavender potted along the street. I put
foot
after foot and wonder: How tall will that tower reach? Is there a bath-
room
in the giant crane threatening First Street?

I stop at a café and contemplate art as if it's religion, ramble from lunch
to work to school, building with blocks. I have a way of translating
ambition into miles, meandering down unexplored streets somehow
comfortable
thanks to well-spaced trees and weathered benches.

A conversation tumbles through my head as I admire manicured
lawns,
porch furniture made for reading Frost, and consider the shape of my
future—
a rectangular garden plot.

A hummingbird hovers over peonies, works its way from plant to
plant,
a display of diligence with furious wings.

The range east of here absorbs the sun, grants a gentle reflection like a
lover,
its strength mined straight from stone.