

## Wilderness House Literary Review 10/4

Robert Joe Stout  
**Exile**

A movement flashing past his eyes  
then gone. He pawed at where he'd seen it,  
then slid back into his chair, the image  
vague—some woman he had known?  
Encountered in a dream? He shook his head.  
Women there had been throughout his life  
but none like her. Or it. A ghost?  
He mocked the thought. In all his life  
he'd never seen a ghost. *But I saw something*  
he insisted to himself, remembering a walk  
along a beach when shadows swept  
across the setting sun and he'd heard  
what seemed like someone singing.  
Mermaids he'd teased himself and bought  
a trinket for his daughter, a tiny female being  
perched upon a shell. His daughter,  
like the trinket, far away. He laughed,  
then took a second look where *it* had been.  
What seemed to be an iridescent coin  
that vanished when he picked it up  
but left a sea scent on his fingertips.  
*Am I imagining..?* the thought absorbed  
by someone singing and the sweep  
of waves across submissive sand.

Hiker, Sunday Afternoon

Beneath bamboo hunched stolidly  
along the river bank he saw a dog  
—large, black, its forefeet spread  
to claim the road as his. *Turn and go back?*  
As though in affirmation the dog bared  
its teeth, then awkwardly hunched to full height  
—but on three legs, a hind one crimped  
into a stump. *Ay pobre...* he edged forward  
hand extended. The dog growled, started  
forward, stopped, head twitching to absorb  
suspicious scents. *Unsure?* He rubbed  
his palms together, smiled. The dog ratcheted  
a throaty grunt but stood its ground.  
“Okay, big guy,” he boistered, forefinger  
tapping bill of cap. Twenty paces  
back along the road he turned. The dog  
was hobbling in retreat but also turned.  
Its bark, though gruff, was not victorious.  
In compromise each one had lost.  
Or gained a curious mutual respect.

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Off My Son Goes

skateboard tilting  
as he kicks  
and swerves around the corner.

I hear the crack  
of something against cement  
remembering

when I was twelve

I raced across the frozen river  
shattering thin ice that covered it  
and watching it  
swirl downstream.

*Risk?*

no thought of it.

As we grow  
the things we remember expand  
and we live

those events

over again,  
not well perhaps  
but with hope  
that the hurts  
won't remain.