

## Wilderness House Literary Review 11/1

*Emily Strauss*  
**The War Chronicles**

### March 14th

hot & cold numbness today:  
I watched two men brawling  
on the street below my window  
but I can't fight their battle

instead I sliced my own throat,  
this spring faith & trust died

I should shave my head  
parade in orange robes,  
the war, my war has arrived.

\* \* \*

thinking hurts these days  
my stepping-stone self was only  
a means to his end—  
I am left behind.

I should cry—  
I am an acrobat whose safety  
line is an illusion—  
I need faith not to fall  
in the on-coming times,  
but I have lost mine.

\* \* \*

Meanwhile a real war arrives  
I watch it on TV  
with cold rain at dusk,  
curled up tight  
alone the first black night  
the storm rattling the windows.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 11/1

Those women will cry for weeks  
they will lose someone too  
now the hard life begins  
when we respond as we must,  
without pleading.

\* \* \*

I cried and begged him at first  
but never again—  
now I only stand watching  
as he fades away.

I'm close to my limit here  
like a shadow at noon,  
listening for absent birds  
thin threads shiver  
in the breeze, this dance  
of agonizing death.

\* \* \*

There is still the war on TV  
and rain, cold gray fog  
the forces conspiring—  
I am broken and empty  
dangling over a deep chasm  
a puff of wind would crush  
me against the jagged rocks.

I try writing into the horizon  
with shadows waiting  
just out of view, waiting  
to steal my sleep.  
I am without words.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 11/1

\* \* \*

Can we watch our own hands  
being amputated— the slow  
slice of the blade touching  
each layer, slowly severing  
parting the fibers, the blood  
beginning to ooze, droplets  
gathered at the leading edge  
the life, love, dripping away?

I am a ghost in this far-away  
land, the unfamiliar street sounds,  
tanks, a blotter for the pain.

Or I am a figment of the world's  
loss, a cast-off shell  
with gossamer threads, a whisper  
of something destroyed  
in my private war, like  
that TV war.

\* \* \*

my hope keeps retreating  
like driving a very long road  
all day, stopping only  
to refuel—  
waiting to get somewhere,  
never arriving.

I will know when it's time  
to stop this grief,  
when I find a view that soothes,  
the map no help, I wait for days  
to pass, banish all thoughts.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 11/1

\* \* \*

I'm being forced back  
within myself, the news  
on TV is bad and I am tired.

His non-decision became one,  
love no longer supports  
the future, the sand falls out  
of a basket tipped over  
in our haste to escape the now.

\* \* \*

the vessel lies broken, how  
can I balance before falling—  
if I breathe too hard I will tip.

Women shouldn't complain  
when their man falls asleep  
on them after making love,  
remember that weight, don't  
wish your gift back.

\* \* \*

the TV war is over now, like me—  
I broke during a war and  
an epidemic that worsened  
daily, I fell apart as the world  
did, now I return to solitude  
gingerly, doing damage only  
to myself like glass shattering

crunching underfoot, the knife  
digging & twisting, too many  
points of pain to bear.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 11/1

\* \* \*

my memories are only  
private views I will carry  
for awhile, a mosaic of the past—  
when the threads are cut  
we only hold what's left inside.

Of course it's raining &  
lightening on the last night,  
thunder rolling like a rock  
quarry being blasted to rubble  
flashes far off over the hills  
flares shining under the clouds,  
sparks from running horses, rain  
washing the streets in torrents.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 11/1

May 9th

It is over: our beliefs are not reality,  
only interior support, how we choose  
to view a war is uniquely ours:  
truth or lies, it doesn't matter.

I am leaving this land now,  
carrying the memories of battles  
personal and public,  
irretrievable pieces scattered behind—  
a waiting room at a station  
filled with happily  
departing strangers.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 11/1

### Chinese Pastoral

As in a Chinese scroll, but not—  
here are endless green fields cut  
into squares hedged by bare poplars

lined with raised paths between patches  
of muddy lotus ponds, rice, vegetables  
the men on bicycles or in the water

their pants rolled to their knees, gnarled,  
kneeling women washing babies, shirts,  
fresh greens all in that same lotus pond.

Life is poor and slow. In the evenings  
men sit smoking from crude bamboo  
water pipes, their wives soak tired feet

the kids play with cheap plastic toys, one  
kerosene lamp is lit, thin bedding unfolded,  
a train passes unnoticed, we passengers stare.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 11/1

### Camping Above Mono Lake

That night we drove  
down a dirt track  
overlooking the lake

reflecting snowy peaks,  
parked in the icy sage  
and juniper, gathered brush

dug a shallow hole  
into snow-soft dirt,  
lit a fire that burned fast

spread burlap and food,  
coats and blankets  
then opened the beers

gazing down the basin  
moon-lit craters far beyond  
glassy-blue water darkened

by passing clouds blowing  
across the pass, and we spoke  
of many things, stared at the fire

orange and bright, sometimes  
at each other, faltered, sat  
silently, listened, embraced

our coats, finally scattered  
the coals and slept.  
In the morning he gave me  
a hard look and disappeared.



## Wilderness House Literary Review 11/1

Two years later he returned  
filthy and drunk, ragged,  
begged for a bed to sleep in.  
I remembered the blue lake  
  
shook my head, closed the door.