

## Wilderness House Literary Review 11/1

*Ken Wolman*

### IN PRAISE OF HAUNTINGS

Where the tract houses face the last woods,  
the deer materialize through sunrise mists,  
weeping for vegetation. Seen  
fleetingly from cars, their substance  
is stealth and disbelief: a doe and her fawns,  
apparitions of fading forest memories,  
oblivious to tort or damage,  
fight back starvation in someone's front yard  
with graceful, mindless theft.

Persistent, spooked, and beautiful, they  
cannot learn the customs of come-lately highways,  
step instead into semis making 80 on the downgrade.  
Frozen in the speed lane, run to ground, they are yours,  
meat and reproach. Stop to check the damage  
to the chrome: the other deer drift silent  
from the woods, stare through great shining eyes.

SPRING SONGS: HEARING THE CHIMES AT MIDNIGHT

1

I have cut down an old pair of Levis  
to honor the advent of spring.  
It seems a nice touch: to exhibit my legs  
to astounded neighbors, thereby to defy  
the (at times) suspicion—truly, the dread—  
that I'm nearly ready for the dog track,  
for lime-green pants and golf courses.  
In me still is the vanity of the preening bird,  
the red heart under the graying feathers.  
The breast pounds visibly, the chest lurches forward  
like a VW Bug with a slippery first gear.  
Yet it moves all the same, against all, inexorable.

2

In the malls you take your life in your hands,  
for there are always the little old men,  
octogenarian cherubs, like Hummel figurines crowned  
with baseball caps: white hair framing red complexions,  
raging against the dying of their lights by  
brazenly steering old cars—in blessed  
oblivion of parking spaces—through some remembered Luna Park  
of bumper cars: shouting at, hating, pedestrians  
because they still can walk.  
They count their days, hoarding, reusing them  
like teabags, fluid thinning through the filter  
against the day when the liquor runs clear,  
and they become white light, conductors of the air.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 11/1

3

What was I doing thirty years ago?

It is not a pleasant memory:

"I wasted time, and now doth time waste me."

When thirty years more have passed,

I will live perhaps: still live in the solitary  
silence of 72 years.

I will live perhaps: still live with the face I have made,  
some cherubic, smooth-wrinkled composition  
of gently fallen tissue and glistening embers,  
with white hair round my head and face.

I will drink tea each morning, freshly brewed,  
and perhaps I will take long walks.

I will write of being young.

### **PRESIDENT'S DAY 1997: THE FINAL WEEKEND**

My wife wants to see *The English Patient*,  
but it's sold out for the shows we want.

We settle for the reissued *Star Wars*,  
but instead of a New Hope the air screams there's *no* hope,  
that on President's Day, the next Monday,  
our personal Death Star will explode above us,  
rubble falling earthward in shapeless chunks.

It may burn to nothing in the atmosphere,  
but where we stand, my wife's back is to me,  
her shoulders untrembling all the same, her voice  
icy as planetary frost, her words cold,  
telling me what I already know: "You've  
been having an affair." The shock value  
of discovery, the revelation  
of treachery, is softened by a fact:  
I cannot deny it, will not deny it.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 11/1

I am caught in a web I long ago wove,  
its multicolored filaments shining,  
yielding to the touch, not even sticking  
to my fingers. So I nod, whisper "Yes,"  
and meet her gaze, for what else can I say?  
"I deny it"? Of course not. I cannot  
beg cold mercy from the ice, forgiveness  
when I want none, just for the world,  
so long frozen, to spin forward yet again.