

Wilderness House Literary Review 11/1

Roy Bentley

The Ice Cream Truck in the Barn

After the debacle with Two Men & a Truck ended—
the invoices signed, dated—the new owners walked

the property and found a small slouching barn where
someone warehoused an ice cream truck. An old one,

a wreck, sliding windows ruined, the glass spidered
and the Mister Softee logo on either side perforated

with rust that may have started in the rocker panels
and progressed. License plates read *Ohio* and *1959*.

The interior stank of decades of cow shit and straw.
By an Elvis calendar, dispensing machines had been

looted. The previous owner had likely kept the relic
for a look he got upon opening the door to the barn:

for a tug in the gut the Fifties are, though most folks
misremember—or overlook altogether—segregation

and the discrimination against women, against gays.
They want back hours of *Gunsmoke*. James Arness.

The past will smell up a place if you keep it around.
But this was that breath of summer breathed again!

So he may have housed the artifact for the pleasure
of saying how it was and having the proof to share.

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Scars Remind Her of the Accident and the Perfect Swarm of Pain and Injury but Also of the Healing

There's the left shoulder's rose-colored tracing
that follows the curve of muscle and collar bone
like a lover's touch, the left armpit's running seam
unnoticed until it was too late for stitches, a pinkish
dime-sized tattooing from a chest tube's insertion—
the left thigh left upper hip markings from pins
to reassemble a crushed and splintered femur
recalling the future as the center of nothing
and testifying to the force of the impact,
the last held note of a scream then stillness.

Ankle and tibia assemblies, screws and plates,
were as much about fracture as union then,
though now they grace the right lower leg
with a map of matrices that draw me close
and send me out, the facts of life measurable
along parallel established lines of demarcation,
as if there were a demilitarized zone somewhere
to either side of whatever dead light we stand in.
Were the body made of cut-glass, and translucent,
any one of us would be looked into and through,

manifest immediately in the still surfaces of things,
which is of course not the way of flesh, never was.
What we are, as you said, once pieced together
as from a kit, is a set of pleasing illusions of self
and self-centeredness and selfish flight, at 19—
wasn't it about the next heart stitched itself to yours,
the stuffed birds of childhood having flown away
on battered but serviceable wings? We'll say
a C-section notation and half-moon biopsy
are the vertical-running initials of God.

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The Leaping Cat's Human Assistant

If you wanted to know what it's like, guiding
a 400-pound Siberian tiger's sovereign glide path,
positioning hoops of flame or a pedestal, covering
for the random poor disposition of quadrupeds,
afterwards in his silver trailer would be the place.
You'd carry in categorical praise like a drunk friend
you came by to pour into bed. If he asked you in,
and you sat, a spiral notebook opened on your lap,
one of those micro-recorders ready to take down
what you miss tracing a fine-veined facial scarring,
a line of suture marks like the fletching of an arrow,
evidence of implicit trust, he'd likely be no talker.
Gone quiet perhaps, he'd point to the snow outside.
An ease of fall through the aisles of tree branches
or the carnival-bright particulars of a room lit
by the bald indifferent glow of a rent-a-sign.
You would want, in his own words, the camber
of feral shoulders at the animal height of each jump,
the way he ritually checks off what is about to happen
in an incremental three- or four-step "drop" — which,
he says, another reporter compared to a pro quarterback.
Circular trailer windows would bleed resonant veins
of snowmelt, an embroidered velvet throw-pillow
reverse-reflecting the phrase *Panthera tigris altaica*.
He'd wave you to walls of circus posters, memorabilia.
All business, you'd begin: *How did you acquire the cat?*
He'd thief tumbler from a kitchenette pass-through.
Set the glasses on a table. If you were attractive, his type,
or lucky—you don't have to know tigers to know luck—
he might pour you some of what he was having. "We
grew up together," he'd say, opening a bottle of Scotch.
An epithalamium of dark liquor would leap to glasses.