

Wilderness House Literary Review 11/3

Donald Peach
Stump Pond

I

On a map Stump Pond lies
Like a flattened squirrel on the road,
Its tail obliquely connected to the body,
The narrow cove where
I was conceived.

By those fecund shores let us
Walk that stained path where
On a January night in the back seat
Of a forty-nine Plymouth you
Wrote with naked feet your names and the names
Of future generations on a frosted
Windshield. Your brains turning,
You wrote fast.

II

Stump Pond stirs little, except for
Cottages sprouting condominiums, tar
Burying gravel, inlets growing thick with algae
Like cancerous tongues.

Granddad consoled the broken wives of soldiers
In World War Two while grandma consoled
Herself with a gallon of Stump Pond
In her lungs.

Granddad smoked cigars with a glass eye.
Grandma's shriveled arthritic fingers transformed
Her into to a Greek myth confusing yesterday's fish.

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III.

At eighteen I read too much
And sang a simple song: I wish
To live, a deep quiet place
With nothing to gain
But sweet nature's grace.
My song ends in cold ashes.

Stump Pond's no Walden.
It's not deep, but it's a killer.

IV.

Look: Excrement Island floats on the pond
Like a navel on a convex stomach.
From afar lovers plan
Their trysts little knowing the ducks
And geese have christened the island.
Arriving in canoes like early lake dwellers
They turn in disgust and seek other
Shores.

V.

Our little house failed to slide into the pond
Despite decades of shifting.

We left just in time.
For a time love
Lived there and I sang to my bride:
Breathe softly, love
For immortality's wings
Are fluttering near.
The bird may hover,

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Imperceptible, here
In somewhere's center
Stilling passion's cycles and spinning cycles
Anew. Amen.

Despite my song I still dream of the pond
Flooding the basement with black water.
Old tires and rotted boards
Creep up the stairs to the living room.

Next door an elderly couple made coffee and quilts.

VI.

What yellow-throated trumpet called you to sail
Your hearse into the shallow water?
Did your ears ripple
As you drowned in the tepid pond?

Did you see the snarled stump of death?

Your bloated body gave no information
Except as the owner of a waterlogged
Manila envelope swimming in the trunk.

Its raining, it's pouring
Granddad was whoring.
He went to bed
With the wife of Ned.
No one came to mourning.

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VII.

A white nun you waited in the hospital bed,
A white cloth dressing your scented head,
A white bride for the afterlife. Water led
The floor near the bed.
No idea, the nurse said.

VIII.

Can we speak for a moment,
Our fingers dangling in the clearing water
Below the hills now holding up expensive
Retirement homes, the same hills where natives
Gathered sticks and fish and pointed them
At the sky? Now can we sit in the gazebo
And rest, noticing how the myrtle
Redeems the fallen wall?