

Wilderness House Literary Review 11/4

Candice M. Kelsey
The Canals

As I dog-ear the page on a great Harjo poem,
I remember the pig ears I have for
my own dogs, guilt offerings in
exchange for their stuffed crate weekdays.
Happy.

I can't help but pet the boxer's velvet ear
while she celebrates her makeshift kill.
I slip my finger inside her buttery
canals dimpled with ground pepper flecks. I feel
the warmth of her canine cranium.
She doesn't mind.

As I peer into her ear, I see a girl pushing a
stroller through the Venice canals. The child
kicks her bare feet in feather fly grace; her
face the grave focus of a Japanese ramen chef.
They don't speak.

I blow cool breath into this dog's ear.
I see flutter and fly of the egrets lifting over
the white bridges and the girl who cannot bear
another minute inside the aquarium apartment, its
wood stove and single sliding closet.
And the stench of cats.

The birds mock her. She walks these canals
like Jane Eyre on the moors, on Rochester's past.
And as she wipes a crumb from the child's
mouth, she imagines a bartender using his dish towel
to wipe the inside of a long stem wine glass.
She hopes, some day.

The child's salt-sea fingers lift toward her
own ear like the buoyant arms of a paper
nautilus. But there's nothing left: the girl has
receded from the silt chambers of Abbot Kinney.
Grown.

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I remove my unctuous ear fingers.
My dog lumbers away with the cool boredom
of that neighbor who prefers watering his
patterned terra cotta pots of juniper
rather than letting me bend his ear.