

## Wilderness House Literary Review 11/4

*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,  
Imperceptible, here  
In somewhere's center  
Stilling passion's cycles and spinning cycles

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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.

### 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.

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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?