

Wilderness House Literary Review 13/3

Mark Trechock

Facing My Accuser

Lingering over a sick day breakfast,
I skimmed an essay by Gretel Ehrlich
recounting failed seal hunts up north,
no ice, no meat, more ocean.

A thump against the window next
to the bird feeder startled me.
I looked up to see a pine siskin,
a flash of butter under its wing,
staring off unmoving from a winter
lilac branch, its beak ajar
in shock. I watched for a moment
to see what came next,
but the microwave chirped and the phone
rattled to remind me of the doctor's
appointment. The day began.

An hour later, shod, jacketed, brushed
and deodorized, my ankle wrapped
and stuffed in a brace, I gingerly trod
the sidewalk toward the garage,
when across my path the siskin wobbled
its right scapulars dragging in the snow.

It stopped, and stared directly at me—
the look my mother showed to instill shame.
Breaking our eye contact first,
I limped off to the clinic.

The Shelter Belt

Now that the boom is over
at least for now,
we have new roads,
but nowhere new to go;
new apartment buildings,
but none to live in them,
except for those who have
nowhere else to go;

New malls surrounded
by empty parking lots,
their plate glass promising
spas and nail salons and pet stores,
or just square footage for lease;

A new hospital and clinic,
no takers for the old one,
no mental health unit
for the stranded addicts
who can't pass a piss test
to drive the trucks,
or build the drill rigs
to hold the mineral rights
in case the price of oil
goes up again;

And phantom malls
like the one across from the clinic,
the dirt work done
but nothing constructed
except a "for sale" sign,

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Where once there stood
a shelter belt
of Russian olive trees,
planted to slow the wind
and save the soil,
where once I watched
a bald eagle hunting
from a treetop perch.