

Wilderness House Literary Review 15/2

Jim Steele
Afraid

I glanced at her from my cafe table.
I'd never seen a girl try so hard to be invisible,
the way she hunched over her book,
hiding behind her long hair.
I glanced back at her and met her eyes.
She immediately looked down as though
caught peering through the keyhole,
and bracing for punishment.
She hunched even more, closing in on herself,
her arms circling her book, hair draped like a curtain.
I shifted, my chair scraping the floor.
No - she said softly, not looking up,
leaning away, crossing her arms in protection.
My God. I hope whoever hurt you is far, far away.

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Empty Shell

I stood across the street from the
large, abandoned building.
Its windows were broken, doors missing,
it was crumbling from every edge.
Its vital organs were gone,
having moved on to safer locations,
leaving it with the pulse of scavengers.
The cranes and dozers would descend
one day and relieve its misery.
I could still hear its echoes
and imagine its former glory.
I would've loved to walk its corridors
one last time, but I think the building
would embrace me and never let me go.
The demolition crew would release the
wrecking ball and never hear my cries.

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First Touch

From this park bench I can see the forest not far beyond.
It used to circle this plot of earth, withstanding weather and time.
Then the bulldozers arrived and did indiscriminate things.
People walk past on a man-made path of cement,
with painted numbers for the serious joggers.
Behind me is a man-made lake,
once a fill dirt crater, filled later by run-off.
Now, this once grassy field is covered
by paddle boats, toy submarines, and swans.
I look past the humanity again, to the small forest
behind its chain link fence, erected to prevent
the remaining trees from fleeing, I imagine.
Only ten minutes past the barrier,
and the sounds of humans vanish.
A centuries old quiet empties the air and refills it
with nature sounds that have echoed for a thousand years.
Deeper in, where paths have never existed,
I could place my hand on a tree that has never known human touch.
What would this great thing gather from my resting hand?
Simple curiosity? Or the beginning of its end?