

Wilderness House Literary Review 15/4

R.D. Scarborough

An evening on the patio outside the bagel shop

Bagel Dave says Gaia is displeased with us
and leans his cane against the iron gate to explain.
Behind his mask of multicolored stripes, his face is a map of soft lines—
flecks of light shine in his tired eyes.
He clutches a brown paper bag
full of day-old bagels and a bottle of whiskey.

Bagel Dave is hunched with pain, but he prophesies:
his daughter will move to England and become an ex-pat,
and he'll be greeting the people of the world
from behind the glass of Bloomington Bagel Company, waving as we pass by,
and that his broken arm will heal in a few weeks.

He says the earth is angry with us, that we've mistreated her for too long—
he raps his cane on the sidewalk, he bangs his head against the gate.
He warns us to never run in flip-flops.
He says we must respect her— Gaia—
that she is all we have.

We agree; the wind agrees,
the trees whistle in a swirling chorus of agreement,
Bagel Dave coughs.

He turns to go, but stoops to retrieve his cane
and leans against a tree to catch his breath,
winded from his speeches,
he tells us he'll see us soon.
"We know," we tell him,
Bagel Dave is always there
even though the world has failed him.

Gaia is displeased with us
but the ground holds still.
Bagel Dave slouches into the waning sun.

Wilderness House Literary Review 15/4

Kinship

Who else walked on these bricks?
Did they squint their eyes against the wind, as I do,
and think about how close to an approaching stranger
they must be, before they say hello
or give a nod?
Did they, too, feel the sun on their face
and feel their organs and flesh and soul glow with joy?

I imagine they also rose early,
and ate and drank the daily news and worry and smalltalk and spit them
into the sink
and took whatever they loved, hated or puzzled over
and put it away in a drawer,
and put on a coat and walked into the new air—

Did they, too, get hair in their mouth?
Did they look back at the building they'd just exited, perhaps for the last
time,
and wonder who next would walk
on those bricks?

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How I love eggs on toast!

They could be the great delight of my day,
this instant of the morning
during which my body first recognizes, with all available senses,
the presence of a joyful thing—
of the first bite—
the excitement of the sensation, after so long a rest!

The sun is hidden behind custard clouds—
I find it, shining with butter, in the firm golden curds,
I find it spilling into the craters of my toast—
a craggy platter for my sunshine eggs.

I sit cross-legged at the wooden table,
facing the window and the morning,
my face full of breakfast-steam.
I am full of smells, I am poised
to break the rugged crust that holds this sacred food,
to fill myself with warmth that I've prepared,
that the earth has prepared for me.
Earth meeting sky.
Upon the first bite, everything in me laughs with joy
and welcomes the morning into my belly.