

Wilderness House Literary Review 16/1

Michael Estabrook
timelessness

The *Brewster's Ladies' Library* started
by two ladies 150 years ago
is still going strong. My mother
volunteers there, holds the record
for the most volunteer hours worked
during the year.

"I love this place," she says
as we leave the book stacks and wander back
into the newspaper reading room
with its musty newspaper smell. An old man
in a heavy brown coat, slouched down
like a crumpled walrus in a big leather chair,
doesn't even glance up from his newspaper
as we enter the room.

But I can see the slight smile
as he overhears my mother's reverent voice
talking about the library, with its quiet corners
and sacred spaces. "I love this place,"
she says again as she takes
my arm, the color rising in her cheeks.
My dad would be proud of her I think,
taking such good care
of all these books.

Wilderness House Literary Review 16/1

Simply Eating Her Salad

Sometimes I become completely overwhelmed
by merely being in her presence,
like this afternoon
at McDonald's with the grandchildren,
suddenly I'm choked with emotion,
barely able to speak,
while simply watching her
sitting there eating her salad, quietly, unassumingly.

I had to work at not crying,
(What a silly spectacle I would've been.)
dabbing at my eyes
with a crumpled McDonald's napkin.
"Guess my eyes are watering
because it's so cold outside."
(Sure, nice try, you silly old man.)

I can understand being so smitten
when you first fall in love – how can you not!
The beauty, the youth, the vigor and vitality,
the inescapable mystery of it all,
crashing over you like an avalanche in the Alps.
But come on! I've been at this now a long time,
with this woman almost half a century!
How could it be possible
that I still get choked up watching her
sitting there simply eating her salad?

Wilderness House Literary Review 16/1

Pariah

At the baggage carousel I ask
how she got her dog so well trained
to lie still at her feet for six hours.

“Two years specialized training,
been with me five.
I have a rare immunological disease” she says.

Her voice is quiet, shaky
but maybe it’s the surgical mask she’s wearing.
“I give lectures all over the country
so we do a lot of flying together.”
I imagine she’s smiling.

Tough enough traveling with a baby
but a dog all the time, impressive.

Her red hair pulled back in a ponytail
makes me wonder (for some reason) if she
can have normal relationships
can she kiss a man for example, but of course
I don’t ask her that.

On the plane I thought she was a whack-a-doodle
with the dog, the mask, the headphones
and now I want to hear
her whole story, want to see her face,
touch her hand.

As I’m leaving with my bag
she gives a faint little wave
grateful I assume that someone talked to her.
Take care I say and wave back reminded once again
that you can’t tell a book . . . and all that.