

Wilderness House Literary Review 16/3

Richard H. Fox

Antebellum plantation, 1978

20th Century oasis. Doorman
thumbs his peaked cap, gestures
to the mahogany counter.
Youthful clerk smiles, requests

identification. Frowns.

Two surnames require two
rooms. Brides must be Mrs.
Grooms. My wife flips him

our wedding license. Never
heard of a girl keeping her
maiden name. Unmarried
name, counters my wife,

in her Molotov sparking
fuse voice. I propose to him.
Please check with your boss.
Courteous simpers exchanged.

Owner strides out front,
shakes my hand, nods to
your pretty lady. We'll get
this straightened right out.

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He stares at our ID's,
license. Grins. Pulls two
keys off a single hook. As
I lean to sign the ledger,
the obvious occurs to me.
Other than the doorman,
every face—Vanilla White.
My neck chain pops over

a slyly open shirt button.
Owner glares at a freed
Star of David,
a smug sheeny smirk.

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What's the best temperature to serve POETRY raw?
autobiographical poemlets

Glass Yahrzeit candle forbidden. Hazard may inflame me.
Pop-in bulb flickers. Brass socket's psalm shall tame me.

Vanity demands, accepts the poet's death. Pining permitted.
Teeming subconscious bares grief. Omens don't blame me.

Chemo brain davens Kaddish. Seventh blessing forgotten.
Yip souls jig with IV poles. A musical no one can name me.

Dad's birthday gift from neighbors, a professional tool chest.
He uses only screwdrivers. I chuckle, let irony claim me.

Yaps NP, "Living worth the agony?" Even trade-though inconvenient.
Verify by That final laugh, graphic humor amuses God. Proclaim me.

Ruefully, Dad cradles Mitsy Dog. Yearns for absolution.
Richard carries her crate. Final vet visit, Those Trusting Eyes became me.

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Mikey

In honor of Michael Charles Biegner (1956-2021)

I.

Who's next in line?

I ask Kyle, my pustule-faced, PEG-tubed doppelgänger.

The blood lab boss interrupts, Kyle S. He yells YO!

We high-five. Catch you in the vampire cave.

The boss nods to me, gestures with her clipboard. I follow Kyle.

Embraced by recliners—shirts open, ports peeking—we're accessed.

The nurses count to three, poke needles in our chests.

No burn, pinch, sting, or prick. We're cancer patients.

Good blood draw, they echo, a Greek chorus. The game is on.

I'm getting more tubes drawn than you, Kyle. I'm feeling it.

No way, man. I have exceedingly rare DNA. Doc needs extra for research.

The nurses, privy to the competition, display tubes in trays.

Kyle 12. Me 14. Who won?

II.

Who's next in line?

A tiny foot tickles my arm. I turn, smile at Joanne.

She bounces her four-month old son.

Kyle's up, then me. Are you in a hurry? Can swap if you want.

She shakes her head. Nah. Just nosy.

My chemo won't be up from the pharmacy for an hour.

Will you hold Joshua? Just changed his diaper. I gotta poop. Wicked bad.

I hug the baby against the port-less side of my chest.

Joanne arranges a rag over my shoulder. Sprints to the potty.

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III.

Who's next in line?

A radiation tech replies, You. Before Kyle today.

She picks at skin on my neck.

After this session, see your nurse.

You're peeling again. Need a three-day wrap.

Ask for gauze and Aquaphor if you're out.

Take day four off, then wrap again.

Rad 28 of 35. Eighty percent through torture.

IV.

Who's next in line?

No answer.

Log on the men's cancer support group.

Jacob: colorectal mets, liver.

Stay Strong!

Wally: trial shrinks pineal mass.

You got this!

Jamal: ScanXiety, post-ablation CT.

Bring It On!

Theo: welcomed into hospice.

Praying for peace, Brother.

V.

Who's next in line?

Me. You.

Mikey lives past expiration date.

Endures agony, angst, dread to walk his daughter down the aisle.

Delivers a poem. Dances with the bride.

Home, his outline in bed, comfort.

He dreams horizons.

Dies.

Mikey defeated cancer.

In Consideration of Creed

after Meg Kearney

Concede control, denial fueled by conceit. Concede the Red Sox will avoid defeat if I stand and don't touch the couch. Concede prayer replete with ritual does not alter a CT scan's capture. Concede all oncology protocols end with but. Concede rain is falling, an abject challenge to channel one-o-eight's meteorology report. Concede a locked deadbolt is a victorious retort to the knob's key. Concede a bad mood intractable when good intentions revolt. Concede kindness may be unable to soften rude. Concede routine surgery includes precious risks. Concede oxygen knows to explode in the presence of lit incense sticks. Concede your buddy in the next recliner perished in a code blue. Concede the significance of a server in a diner sitting at your table. Concede stable layering of lasagna a monument to the dead. Concede treatment options mirror Hobson choices instead of shaping debates over the cost of living. Concede physical pain is endurable if your hushed voice speaks gratitude. Concede death as the peak of life's ridge. Concede birth as the bridge leading to life. Concede the girth of graceful ignorance, encountered in fog below tree line.