

Wilderness House Literary Review 17/2

Paul Ilchko

Communion

We climbed to the very top it wasn't what you would call a mountain just a large hill but the path was rocky and the effort required was considerable we passed a house with painted siding well preserved the roof looking almost new it was centered in a clearing so that the sky might be visible and the sun might shine for a brief period each day allowing a small garden to grow on the south-facing side there was a man working there he had a trowel and was gently turning earth with the appearance of great concentration there were birds in the woods — we heard their songs and saw the occasional flash as they crossed from tree to tree and it struck me that if you were to stay here still and quiet you would see a great amount of wildlife crossing this space and I said to you — do you remember? — that I had never felt so close to the earth as I picked up a handful and let it trickle through my fingers — it was black and soft — and to my surprise there were earthworms in it so close to the surface and as I spilled them again I looked across the clearing and saw the dog watching me ears alert sniffing the wind and she saw me looking at her and something passed between us both of us motionless for a time and then she walked away out of sight behind the building as the man continued to dig.

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Reconciliation

I ask my mother to tell me everything give me
detail so much is missing from my life I grew up
on the hills where little could grow bare and wind-blasted

though the valleys and the lower slopes were farmland
that harvested the springs and streams that fed
the greater rivers as they made their way towards the sea

not a small world not constrained the way it might be
in the parlors of the larger towns but there was hunger
you could see it in the blazing eyes of skinny children

and so I ask my questions digging deeper into
the economics of those times what differed between
the country lanes where I was raised and the thronging

city streets that I would dream of it took me years
but somehow I found a way to bridge that gap
it took a certain courage a willingness to be uprooted

leaving behind me what I thought of as my life never
one to listen to preachers I made my exodus just as she
once did cutting ties that never were repaired I sailed

across a world now smaller than the one she traversed in her youth
it's now the time to merge these separate paths two journeys
converging on a common point two lives awaiting reconciliation.

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Eternal Sonnet

We were trapped in the jaws of the eternal bathed
in a pool of sodium lamplight unable to comprehend
that you were gone and that we would never see
you again the significance not fully registering until
we saw the coffin that sad box of cheap pine stained
and polished to give the appearance of solidity we stood
there in silence as a spider rappelled from the light fixture
neither one of use able to speak or even move inside
the box your sinews hardening to iron just as our
memories harden into the patterns of metaphor as your
identity changes from person to theory of what a friend
could be unforgotten and unforgiven you were once
someone else's child before you were preemptively claimed
for what remains of our fractional stake in eternity.