

## Wilderness House Literary Review 18/1

*Jeremy Caldwell*  
**Into the Storm Drain**

I pried the manhole cover with a crowbar  
and peeked into the black hole beneath.  
Slowly, steadily, I lowered myself, the city

swallowing me in sections until my feet  
smashed wet leaves. The air felt thick like decay,  
heavy, wrapping me tight in the stench

of stale urine and sickly-sweet chemicals.  
This was the bellyache of the modern world,  
and here I was combing for a lost baseball,

rummaging, bat in hand, through mildewed  
wrappers, empty soda cans, and washed away  
leftovers. In time, a faint guttural groan

echoed down the pitch-black esophagus  
of sewage pipe, rapping my heart  
with a hundred thousand years of history.

And I scurried a furious way,  
and disgorged myself from the mouth  
until street, wind, light devoured me.

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### On the Anniversary of 9/11

It is late morning & I am 34  
but the casual cruelty of teaching  
is aging while students remain the same,  
& soon I will wander  
into a freshman comp classroom,  
to which one emailed earlier,  
*what exactly are we writing about?*  
*I'm just a little confused*  
& I will reply, then think better of,  
*and that will never goes away,*  
& none of them were even born yet,  
& I should excuse them for this  
but they should know where I was that day,  
walking through the cafeteria into puberty  
of a small town middle school  
a thousand miles away, a room  
filled with the smell of thawed chicken,  
& decorated with displays of former  
most-likely-to-succeeds & most-athletics,  
& I'm mesmerized by the small TV mounted  
in the corner - the one which had,  
at that point, never been turned on -  
of a grainy picture of smoke & ash,  
& they should know we all spoke  
in low-grade fevers between classes  
as we swam through our daydreams,  
& everyone murmured about this or that person  
making out with this or that other person,  
& how another's dad once visited those towers,  
& the week before someone else's dog died  
and the grief was *like that,*  
& they should know this is how we grew too fast,  
& how our small teenage bodies

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couldn't comprehend themselves  
in the awe as we sat so close to impossible,  
& they should know we'll never  
entirely be sure of what we lost,  
& that when I turn over each day  
a part of me still stands there, a body  
blinking forward, imperceptibly,  
on the edge of incomprehension.

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### One After the Other

The boy pokes a giant wishbone  
of a stick at the ground, wishing  
I suppose to pop the earth.

The earth has grown tough and cold  
this time of year, withered now  
after the fall of leaves.

I am leaving work and wonder:  
maybe waiting for a friend?  
Maybe an imaginary one?

I once had a friend, real as one  
can imagine, tell me how lonely  
he thought god must be.

God could be this boy,  
or could be the stick.  
One will never know for sure.

What I am sure of is I wish, just once,  
I didn't have to wait to feel alive,  
to say to a complete stranger,

strange as it is but I am like you,  
waiting for the earth to move  
and for once our bodies to travel with it.