

Wilderness House Literary Review 18/1

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ZEN MOUND, BEGINNER'S MOUND

In a field this flat, this late, this tranquil
and unevenly mowed, under a sky as sincere
as it is blank, it's clear why people
make sculpture. Any help we can get orienting ourselves
between two poles is good against depression.

In the distance, a seam of pale green mountains
joins a tiny fence to assert that the earth
and the atmosphere have their own personalities.

This is how far away from us the horizon
always is. You're this far from a rental car, this far
from a garbage can, this far from a seesaw
and a swing set. If your midway between
a hay bale and a windmill, this is exactly how scared
we'd expect you to be.

In the distance, a train gives up.
Something is burning in a canister
beside the water tower. It might be a handful
of obsolete electronics, or a cereal box,
or a map with dragon on it. It might be
a detective novel, a refrigerator manual, a handbook
on how to teach grammar.

There's a place you can be at in a poem
where a barn has only one side, where the air
catches a sheet of plywood in the back
of a speeding pick-up truck and lifts it
into the air, holding it lightly, decently,
until it tilts of its own weight and comes down
vertically, violently into hood
of an old blue station wagon.

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There's a place you can be at in a poem
where the next thing you say will break
your daughter's heart, or her guinea pig's spirit,
or confirm for your father how fitfully
three sparrows stand along a fencepost.

This is how far away from us
the horizon always is.

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ZEN APOLOGY, BEGINNER'S APOLOGY

By whole heartedly, I mean I'm sorry in a way
that audits even stones for bruises, a way
that sits in the park on a shower curtain.

Looking for help with my tone and my need
to overexplain my silence, I'm seeking concrete
and unpleasant laughter at a tray
of my collected condolence notes.

There are so many things I'm exceedingly
worse than: fog, Maine, rhyme, cafeteria noise, etc.

I want to be at least as good as the baby clothes
of the abandoned child
the nurses nicknamed Billy Sunshine and which
a police inspector reported
were "clean and of medium quality."

I vow to be clear as day, completely
accessible, like a bag of bagels torn open
by birds, like the dates on the back
of a concert t-shirt.

ZEN WIND, BEGINNER'S WIND

I started in April, the sun not yet
a small bronze paper weight, the sea not yet
a blue-gray welt in the shakiness of my lower left eyelid.
Architects and nurses out
walking their dogs. Mortgage brokers out
listening at the larger bushes
for proof of sparrows. Every few minutes
a huge gust of wind would make a man
reach up and press his baseball cap against
his forehead. And then, what might have been
the sound of someone untangling wooden wind chimes
from the bars of a fire escape became
a milk crate tumbling into the intersection.
I turned and found a woman face down on the sidewalk.
Her arms were tucked neatly at her sides as if she been placed
there, not struck down by a milk crate blown
from the roof of a bagel shop. Everything
about her was crisp and symmetrical. Her green coat
luminous against the red brick sidewalk. I put my hands
on my thighs. I hesitated. Another man knelt
down and took ownership of the situation.
A siren became my permission to leave.
I gave myself permission. I went back to my apartment
above the pharmacy and looked down
on the movie theater. I looked down
at the teenagers on stone steps surrounding the pillars
with eagles on them. I considered the old, empty billboard
across the traffic circle. I thought about objects
a coward might paint on it.