

Wilderness House Literary Review 18/3

John Zedolik

The Old Tender's Prerogative

1.

She walks the yard where jonquils,
daffodils, crocuses push early

to sun in late winter, under the crown
of a widow's walk though far

from the sea and ships but above
a sharp decline of woods

she may imagine to be land's
abrupt end and the grasping

water below that has snatched
mariners since sailing began

including her love, merchant-voyager
to islands of spice and teak

who might utter her name as the brine
clamped his throat and relaxed

his rope-rough hands she could imagine
as she clears the windfall of the last

months' wrack and careless cast
at the lip of her solid ground.

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2.

Which five years on is hers no more—
debilitation brought permanent migration

enforced—to New England close to that sea
once three hundred miles or so away

but far some the snowdrops that bloomed
yet drooped in deference to the tender,

in March four month beyond her demise,
the old home empty throughout the winter,
unknown to a walker such as me who only
imagined her doings

Passing through

the honey bee was just—

into the sacred space between
dashboard and windshield

where my attention was affixed
stickier than

the viscous gold in any comb
for I was directing

my vehicle at five of a sunny afternoon
near the campus with a graduation

nigh

so was pondering the exchange
of sting for safety—

my remaining whole, alive, enduring
the strange, crystal pain instead of dying—

like the traveler now rolling upon landing
before righting himself—if he delivered

his barb at spur of perceived threat and instinct—
rather than just crawling upon its six legs

in a brief, bristly reconnaissance then up and smoothly
out as if on a gossamer line borrowed from spider

on chance or unthinking charity, no more a guest
in my somewhat private world with a sky of glass

Wilderness House Literary Review 18/3

and earth of molded plastic under a coating of dust
quite open to trespass to those such as you,

small enough to sample these proprietary airs—so I
did not have to make the choice,

relaxed in the release,
only keep the wheels rolling one safe way

Wilderness House Literary Review 18/3

Regime Change

I deem the twilight lasts an hour or more
and festoons the walls and its dependents

with heavy deep gold whose sheen commands
the rooms, whose mood I must obey,

unable to lift the ponderous chains
of that king's ransom strewing from the orb

dropping by unsensed increments but held
in my limited eyes at the adamant base

of horizon whose hot ice will not melt
in this eternal span—so, self-determined—

until I notice the neat dissolve upon the white
paint to gray-blue and no shade at all—but shade

and forces me to acknowledge the end
of *el siglo de oro*, freeing me to my own

sovereignty—I rise in the night to the naked
air and vacuum I do a poor but honest job to fill