

## Wilderness House Literary Review 4/3

*Joanna Beth Tweedy*  
**The Rambler**

I am ginned up about the drive, the moon rising early and fat and just in time so it looks like it's pulled skyward by the setting sun's redray ribbons—the horizon-stretched ones that make shadows their longest and shoot straight across just above the highway to light afire corn tassel-tops and tint crimson and magic the whole world at five feet the ground up. I can tell it will happen soon, that the sun is about to spring its glow across mid-air in a final stretch before bedding the day, and I aim to catch its blaze in my palm, hoping to catch Mystery and gift it to my sister in order to cure her sulk. My ready hand is on the window roller and my head is counting down seconds that have turned to mississippi like they always do when waiting happens.

My sister is hangdog about it all, the packing up the car, the slamming shut the screen door, and the hard-door latch-click—the sound that never you hear unless no one is on the other side of it to holler when you come in and dance up the dust that won't stay outside no matter what gets planted in the yard. She is inside of another shut-up place, dancing barefoot in shallow waters to the songvoice music of the one she is low-down to leave behind. Next to me and the eight-o'clock moon is where she wishes she weren't sitting, wishing it were next to him instead, ankle-washed and heart-thick on a bottomland riverbend, thinking burn-up-the-sun thoughts.

My granny up front—talking thunder and raining down a litany of convection, about the Holy Communion of Saints and the heavens split-open to bucket-down intercession upon us—is not talking about a bona fide gullywasher. Her tempest-talk is about the one we left behind. The only truck clouds have with this sky is their fire-finger reach across the sun, drawing on the moon. I feel brand new to the day even on account of it being mostly over but my sister looks tired when Granny moves from the rain to my sister's notebook, eyeing it cattywhompas and noting that my sister is powerful busy this evening.

My sister hikes the pages more closely to her and more aslant to our granny but keeps on penciling, words tumbling mighty to the page, leap-frogging from heart to thought so alive and gussied they fall spot-into-fit on the page's white and become the whole world, summoning up secret smiles and the kinds of notions that make hearts beat crazy-like. I know because these thoughts are at her side, and that's where I sleep at nights, which she has come-lately acted unhappy about, saying she is too old to have to share sheets anymore, setting Granny to wonder who should be turned out so the queen might enjoy her own chambers.

My granny adds as how my sister and I are going on vacation to keep us from keeping with a rambler, which square from utterance I want to know what's that. Granny is all the time using words I think I know already until I hear them shaped in her mouth. It's an icy eye-roll scold I receive from my sister, looking like she wants to take my bones apart and put them back together wrong on purpose. But Granny is happy to set out her definition for me, which I would be happy about likewise except that it requires further inquiry I don't dare undertake on account of staying off

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the snags in Her Majesty's crown. Calling her that in my head causes a smile she catches and returns but only half-like and without thinking, like a reflex gone feeble, and she is tearing out the page she finished, tucking it behind the others when she asks what I'm staring at.

I look away for the moon's cool white swell at the end of the blood-veined cloud-wisps and listen for my sister's wild heartbeat, the one she told me about last night while she wrote in her notebook about loving him all the way to yonder and so far beyond that distance hollers mercy just thinking about it, which reminded me of the day we visited the zoo and I heard a camel gut-noise a holler out into the world like he'd swallowed all its air and didn't like the taste so he caused it to backwards right out his mouth. I'd shucked tears recalling it but my sister just wrinkled her face and wanted to know could I sleep with the light on because she was going to need it for a while and then kept on writing with me there next to her getting puffy in the eyes on account of the changes between us.

The last of the sun breaks free and blazes color mad across an earth-curve just above us and my arm is pumping at the handle with a fever inside to match the blaze I am reaching toward when the pages of my sister's notebook start to ruffle and then take to the air before either of us can react to stop what happens next when her burn-up-the-sun words flutter hard out the window to ride the flame fast away from us. I big-eye my sister who is looking toward Granny who is satisfied with what she sees in the rearview and we both know the likelihood of her stopping the car is the same as rain. My mouth is open a little with my throat not knowing what sound to make and my heart wanting to fold in on itself when my sister's gaze turns towards mine struggling to hold back every bit of what's inside her, and I would be afraid that this very moment has ruptured every after between us, except for in it I see that we are sun and moon red-ribbon tied, that whatever we may be in this moment and every after, we are for keeps.