

Wilderness House Literary Review 4/4

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saturday summer morning

rotting teeth
glimpsed in the mirror,
the man
inhales a camel
at the breakfast
table
and blows smoke rings
towards
the clapping hands
of the two-year-old
with maple syrup
slithering down his chin.
the smell of bacon grease
and coffee
drifts out to the sun-rich
yard
where the girl jumps rope
and the boy
tosses a ball
up and down,
idly
up and down.

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Strong Drink

Two decades a foreman
At the lumber mill for which
The town was named, he began
Young – his first job to hitch
A team of mules that dragged
Thick logs through mud to whirling saws.
In later years, he bragged
He had studied inch by inch – would pause
In the telling of it and look away
As if wondering whether to go or stay.

Time was he had a wife and kids
And spare acres planted to corn and beans.
How foresee his life would hit the skids,
His kids leave home still in their teens,
The mill close, they said, of slack demand.
Depression, on tight-pressed lips, he heard.
We're letting go not taking on another hand.
Silence enshrouded him and bewildered
His dwindling wife who up and died
As if forgetting how nor even tried.

Ambling from room to room, he took to drink,
Lost the house with the loan long due,
Forgot to bathe and began to stink,
Kicked in the door to a shack that few
In town knew existed nor how to find.
By day, he roamed flowering banks,
Stooped to examine a discarded rind.
At night, he shivered on crumbling planks.
He lit a fire with his remaining match
And left silken ashes for a March wind to catch.