

Wilderness House Literary Review 4/4

Monique Roussel

The Truth a Poet Can Tell

My father is a poet.
He composes sonnets
from behind the wheel of a schoolbus,
although he does not know they are sonnets.

His is the poetry of two wives:
one, a jezebel,
the second a nurse to his stroke.
It is the poetry of too much drink,
a shortness of breath,
then the grip of God's hand about the throat,
and a falling.

Swaying in his busdriver's seat like Keats in a reverie,
he sings the verses of his life like psalms,
prayers to the Roman Catholic God of damnation,
of the wagging calloused finger
that lifted his bloated carcass
into a silver wheelchair.

When he was taken in this way,
Mother told me to rejoice.
They wheeled him before my tender little body,
a crumpled figure in a plaid shirt,
his face moon-like with the ever present sag of remorse,
his hands and feet shackled to the rolling chair,
Aunt Irene standing beside him in a pale yellow dress
tall as a column,
her hair red as fire.

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My father's life is a poem,
large and aching as his hands after fixing an engine,
big and swelled,
bleeding and calloused as Christ's.