

## Wilderness House Literary Review 5/1

*Matt Summers*

### **Going to Bed Alone**

Cars outside ease into their stalls.  
Lights shut down one by one by one.  
Appliances switch themselves off  
as the house slowly loses heat,  
until only the computer hums  
to the ticking of letters:

Going to Bed Alone,  
words that shifts defaults  
to their alternates:  
A clean smell of snow  
becomes lysol, a slept-in sweater  
takes the salty taste of a thigh,  
the smooth jawline of a smile  
seen from behind her neck—

A dog bark echoes  
from storefront to alley wall  
through the open window,  
a gunshot stealing the blanket,  
pouring another glass of wine,  
and falling asleep  
before finishing the movie.  
The silent telephone rings,  
rings and rings.

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### **The Okanagan Mountain Fire British Columbia, 2003**

We were caught in the net  
of alfalfa farms north  
of Kamloops and Kelowna,  
when your breath forced wind  
down through the Rockies  
to stoke the burning forests.

It was a summer of smoke  
and Mountie blockades  
on the capillary highways,  
when your heat became the land's,  
and her reservoirs cooled  
wet as your mouth.

You curved her canyon roads,  
brought the Fraser to my lips,  
and the desert to my artless skin—  
Her poplars and ash  
were your fingers and grit  
waving the sky and soothing my back.  
Lightning danced in the rash,  
you drank me like rain.

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### Permanence Made Obsolete

At a bar named Boundary Bay  
we pass back and forth poem lines.  
She's a jazz and modern dancer  
and I'm trying to turn her poet.  
Her dad has abandoned and come back  
a dozen times, and all her lines  
reflect his wormy reeking underarm!  
Lich, leper, Lazarus—  
I am trying to write the waitress  
watching at our elbows, memories  
of interviews, first dates,  
audition after audition:  
We use each other as generals  
use soldiers to test strategy  
then rephrase it as a question.

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### Mallrat

She shot by my calendar kiosk  
high on attention and samples from See's,  
the crush I felt like a phantom limb,  
dyed-black pixie cut, aerodynamic face—  
her eyeliner even flared like wings.  
She saw me writing and said,  
You should add a car-chase to your poem.

Merchandise clicked like heels  
off the shelves as we talked up our history—  
civics class, wood shop, the time  
she broke up with her boyfriend  
and I tried to swoop,  
but merely dove.  
Then she said I'll be back,

a promise she might keep,  
years after college, after  
Peace Corps gave her malaria  
and sixty funerals in forty days,  
after the first marriage  
left her needing a shield—

I might run into her on a hotel roofdeck,  
or a Tokyo flight, when she'd insist  
You look so familiar! and I'd pretend  
not to remember, but suppose  
a car chase was apt after all.

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### Car Radio

Then that song starts minutes from home,  
rounding the wheel to a drum for my thumbs,  
and the road's a background drone perfectly keyed,  
with every click and chip on beat.

My hand's on your shoulder, your legs uncross,  
and we know all the words like simple facts—  
a mother's voice, the lengths of fingers;  
and to see you smile at memories  
reminds me that music is oxygen,  
the ten percent that keeps us alive and painless,  
the space between electrons that draws them together.

Before it came on you were saying Perception  
is a matter of perception, then I knew  
how important it was to turn the volume a little higher,  
how slowing down might give us the time  
to make it home with nothing left unfinished.