

Wilderness House Literary Review 5/2

Chuck Taylor

I'm Listening, I'm always Listening

Orgasms, from across the coffee
shop I hear the young salesman
talking about his lover's orgasms
on an old cell phone--to another guy,
it's obvious. Who would talk of
orgasms to a sister of mother?
His words ring kind and enthusiastic.
He speaks no put-down four-letter
words and does no rough masculine
bragging. No love slides in his
tone of words, but from where I
sit I can see a glow around
his body—or is that the window
behind him? I swear I can almost
see the wide spread plumage
of the bird-of-paradise. He says
he's leaving tonight by plane
for Chicago and can't wait till
he gets back and they can make more
orgasms. He laughs into his phone,
just before he catches me listening.
He frowns slightly, now nervous,
slightly embarrassed, and stands up
to face the rain and grey outside,
slapping shut his old cell phone.

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Heart Strain

Not so long ago all the grandchildren
came to play in his backyard, leaving their

clothes in a pile on the linoleum
of the kitchen floor, going out the back

sliding door, then naked down the wooden
steps, screaming and laughing to be the first

into the plastic wading pool. The yard
was surrounded by a wooden fence, and

he would stand on the porch and search out the
moon and the intermittent stars sprinkling

the sky, listening to the four of them
scream and laugh and splash water, then get out and

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toss the moon of a rubber ball, or turn
on the hose and shoot spray at each other

with hard shouts of bliss, finding joy in their
naked being together (Oh sure at

times there were fights). There may have been some slight
embarrassment in the delicious feel

of doing something considered a sin
at a different house. His girls are turning

women now, growing buds of breasts. His one
grandson, the oldest, his voice has shifted

down. He's gone, always to his best friend's
house. They don't come over any more to

play, so the man's alone and likes to sit
out back and smoke and tell the scattered stars

and moon above that all his life he was
either a child, or there were the children.

or his children's children. He's never been
by himself and has no clue on how to

be by himself or how to cure the pain
budding in his chest. He pulls off his clothes

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in the naked light of stars and moon, walks
the four walls of the wooden fence that makes

his backyard a box. His body's strong with
life inside to live and give. He walks the

fence with ears listening between the six
foot slats for music, for the singing of

his neighbors, for a clue of what, pray tell, he
is supposed to do, and where, he wonders, he

is supposed to go--to ease the heart's strain,
to find the songs that once were always there.