

Wilderness House Literary Review 5/2

John Buckley
For Charla Nash

An orange toy stays unplayed with in Stamford.
The farcical aspects hurt most, but for
the obvious. If the episode were
less energetic, more animated,

fans of transgression across the land would
hoot and cheer, children wishing it were a
YouTube clip instead of serious news,
their primate senses alert and restless.

An intact skull. No eyes, no lips, no jaw,

Missing “bony structures in her mid-face.”

Arms without hands,

A lot to a paleoanthropologist;
Not enough for her.

She cannot read this.
She cannot speak its lines.
No new-book smell.

Maybe she knew her Harlequin.
Maybe she read of villains’ stooges
with “sinister sinews” and “simian strength,”
threatening couples,
ripping people
apart.
Now she gets it.
Is that too on the nose?

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They tried,
Sandra tried, but
Travis never
evolved into a lad.
Old Navy, love, and
Coca-Cola lacked the prowess
of a warring instinct,
a tick-call,
bloody alarm clock
singing inside.

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Date in Las Vegas

It's sunny and cold inside.
You agreed to go out with me
to this nice restaurant.
Now we sit across the table
from each other.

Your demeanor is cheerful,
upbeat and so very cheerful.
Who could disagree with such cheer?

Your smile,
all the way to the jawline,
to the cheekbones,
is zoomed and cropped
to within a millimeter of
what would give it away.

Your eyes,
cubic zirconia
ambitious to transcend gemological destiny,
scan the right side of each page of the menu,
calculating whether the
extent of my wallet's bulimia
exceeds yours.

Your voice recites
the benefits of time-share properties,
just as it did when we met.

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Why did I ever agree
that a free lunch was worth three hours?
How did we end up
back in a lounge at the Luxor?
The brightness, the frostbite,
when will this end?

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Inheritance

My feckful grandfather rocked the province and New England,
evincing medical effects that shook Foxborough through
the sixties and a bit, just a tad, of the seventies,
whereupon the patriarchy devolved to my Dad and
Uncle Frank, whom with Grank I have to thank for my middle
name, a sissy one by some's reckoning but nothing that
makes me overtly surly, at least not for decades now.

A Korean toddler turns and looks back at me smiling
at him. His father has passed on down the pavement. If a
body meet a body, could I save him, either one, from
their host of lineages and generations, become
amphibious monoliths, wry unphony obelisks
on shores in precious solitude scattered along the coast?