

## Wilderness House Literary Review 5/2

Sally Allen McNall  
**River, mountain**

1.

The brown river, swift, steady,  
a little higher each day and then not  
and then slowing,

the mountain behind it  
bared on one slope, where rock faces  
oppose wind carrying away from the fire  
visible and invisible detritus,  
the great trembling net of everything  
torn and dry, the mountain  
snowy with ash,

the brown river dry, its bed exposed,  
round rocks dusted over with

the evidence.

2.

“the path of least resistance”

3.

We did our best to understand.  
We walked upright  
to this.

The sun's pulse, timed,  
burning gong calling now now now  
to us, in our cage of air.

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### Shelter

The house has eight rooms. You try  
to measure it against the long history  
of useful human dwellings, or

to measure it against all the tent cities and camps  
of the present, still there, though at first  
we called them temporary.

You try, you fail, moving from room to room as if  
these were gestures of the soul, as if the soul  
needed all this geography.

Maybe it does, maybe it forgets easily and needs  
wide windows that look out on trees, or needs  
curtains, to remind it how

to stay aloof from its own suffering, held, walked  
like a newborn, back and forth to rest.

Lost to the world

which will find you. This moment it seeks you out.

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### Extending a metaphor

You want to keep an eye  
on who you are

so when it's time you know  
what can be tossed

overboard and what  
to hang onto till you can't

anymore, don't be one of those  
who can't tie down the soul, let it

roll back and forth on the deck  
until it's breached and empty.

Drop the anchor of your darkness  
down into the larger dark because

[break]

it's yours, you made it, you know how  
how to keep it safe; below deck secure

what you love, close to you  
so you can take it out often

and make it shapely in a new  
way, as you hoist it back into light.