

## Wilderness House Literary Review 6/1

*Chris Crittenden*  
**Old Man's Room**

dust grips blades  
that whirl in bedroom heat.  
how does it cling  
to such spectral velocity,  
and why--

and yet there is so much of it everywhere:  
in the rug, on the nightstand,  
lacquering bookshelves--  
that the answer to this question  
and many others

must surely be dust.

dust assailed by a fan  
that perturbs and dislodges,  
until hordes caper in irascible clouds,  
which come back  
to tarnish the source.

both God and the physicists  
say everything was once cosmic dust,  
birthed by contractions  
of nuclear giants--

mothers as lordly as Hephaestus,  
sacrificing themselves  
on their own anvils,  
forging in a tragic brew--

to birth dust,  
child of their fatal procreation.  
it breeds replete  
across the cling and whirl  
of all that moves.

**Under The Silver**

the moon gazes  
like a denarius  
on the lid of Venus,  
and we wonder  
what else is buried in the mists;  
if truth is a victim  
or a willing sacrifice;  
and whether we ourselves  
are under the silver.

the soil-like sky  
shuffles its den of coffins,  
each a mansion of mutable doors.  
how long have we been  
sawing with harsh prayers,  
trying to get out,  
or to rescue the eyries  
trapped within?

when clouds mesh  
into a metropolis,  
their eye sockets  
yield an immutable rain;  
and if we are to earn daylight,  
we must decipher the turbid sorrow,  
untangle the beasts hinted at  
by clumps of vaporous  
and angry bone.

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### 3am Coffee Shop

to stare at a phantom  
paler than white and lacking a face--  
what does it mean?

to come to understand it  
as a mirror?

he smiles  
at the girl behind formica,  
unable to decide if they have met  
on a mattress of cathode rays.

every night  
is ethereal werewolf love  
and zombies in packs  
groping toward his preternatural  
trigger.

monsters are the salesmen now,  
the persuaders in everything.  
cheap fear, high scores,  
and glimpses of hell.

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### Evil Queen

ugly and unanswered,  
she no longer sees herself  
in her face.  
each wrinkle a ligature  
that strangled a sin.

some lines knots  
caught up in how everything  
came to this.  
no kudos for outliving  
the secrets in her bones,  
or her critics who died  
of disaster.

years have gone down  
like poker cards, pretty faces  
hostage to shovels or sex.  
no one left at the table now  
except Hades, who always  
ups the ante and never fails  
a bluff.

staring into his eyes,  
blank as hell-fired chips,  
she can feel their weight  
and the little numbers  
etched in granite.  
this time she will lose,  
even with diamonds  
to play.

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### Danger Zone

a bout of silence  
bubbles in his head,  
slaying heartburn and beaches,  
stock options, bed bugs and football;  
strangling even the fecund outreach  
of his lust.

for a terrible brief quiet,  
enough to show  
that he's been urgently and  
permanently maimed,  
he can jump through  
a manhole of dirty truth,  
tunneling to expose warrens  
of self-betrayal;  
or he can close this vision  
of mean hope, drown its purpose  
in a detergent of shallow  
stress.

with automatic anger  
and a fuisillade of excuses,  
he puts on his best  
quarterback-Batman face,  
until at last, slow as the pummeled  
rictus of the moon,  
the ghost of innocence past  
goes down.