

Wilderness House Literary Review 6/1

Mark Pawlak

Quoddy Journal III

"My Glass, being opposite to the Window, I seldom shave without cutting myself. Some Mountain or Peak is rising out of the Mist, or some slanting column of misty Sunlight is sailing cross me; so that I offer up soap & blood daily, as an Eye-servant of the Goddess Nature." — *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*

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Quoddy Journal III

20:VII:07

Six Acts

Distant headland
haze-shrouded
in first light.

Mist peels away
slowly in bands
to reveal the crown
bristling with firs.

Fog thins
while sun climbs,
hand over hand, up
a ladder of branches.

Later,
the jagged shoreline.

Later still,
the hammered silver bay.

Splashes of molten gold
close the show.

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21:VII:07

Sweet fragrance of pink and white beach roses
mingled with essence of pine sap
is my preference in cologne.

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22:VII:07

Rental

Hand painted Stars & Stripes decorate tissue boxes in every room. White porcelain beer mugs, inscribed "NATIONAL GUARD," stand on a shelf above the kitchen range, three to each side, flanking a beer stein with America's eagle in bas-relief, wings spread wide against a background of flags. "REENLIST" in red letters on a blue banner wraps around its base: "REENLIST," "REENLIST," "REENLIST." Another banner circles the lip. "WARRIORS," it says, "FIT TO FIGHT," "BE ALL YOU CAN BE." Whose house this is? Why, it's The Colonel's House.

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24:VII:07

Morning After

Although dark clouds
gather behind my back,
I choose to ignore them.

Instead, I pin my hopes
on the risen sun
that right now sits skewered
on the tip of a spruce.

Bushes that have grown up
since this cabin was built
whisper conspiratorially.

A breeze animates their leaves,
revealing silvered undersides
while two birches
scratch each other's back.

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Beyond the forested ridge,
the chain saw that woke me
has given way to a backhoe,
dropping boulders into truck beds.

Man-boy, sound asleep
under quilts in the loft, I know
that you don't really "hate" me,
or wish to "murder" your mother.

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25:VII:07

Constitutional

Close book, lace up shoes,
step outdoors, following
the rain-rutted gravel lane
downhill to its terminus
at the asphalt road
along whose crown
a jagged seam runs
trailing off to
crumbled shoulders.

Cautiously descend
the steep bank
tracing a path
through tall grasses,
sporting seedy heads,
where someone
previously high-stepped.
Pause at the rocky berm

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bordering mud flats
and weed-wigged rocks —
this being low tide.
Breathe deeply,
the rank salt air.

Notice that even pebbles
cast long shadows
in slant morning light.
Observe the bent figures
standing in waders,
raking muck for clams
under the supervision
of blue herons.

Start back,
returning the same way,
but a different person
than you came.

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27:VII:07

A discarded chips bag
lying on the road shoulder
mustard-color with LAYS
written in white script
across a bright red banner

cannot compete with
Hawkweed's yellow petals,
with Bird's-foot Trefoil,
Evening Primrose;
or the abundant Buttercups,
sunniest yellow of all.

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28:VII:07

Starting from bottom of the drive, travel the winding ribbon of asphalt hemmed in by scrub brush and stunted conifers that is Boot Cove Road, enjoying its gentle, roller-coasting dips and rises. Turn in at the turnout where a wooden sign fixed to wooden post announces Boot Head Preserve. Follow the path, wending through moss carpets, quaking bog, stands of dwarf fir and lichen mottled spruces, to where it emerges in Hopperesque light at eponymous Boot Cove. Note the lone clapboard house perched above tide-line in the crotch where sheer bluff meets curvant beach; note also the ancient weir, half submerged; the moored Jon boat whose stern the waves slap. Pick your way along the rocky shore strewn with hanks of frayed rope thick as your wrist, wood and Styrofoam lobster buoys torn loose from pots, ("How do they make Styrofoam, Dad?"), sun and salt bleached planking, and storm tossed tree limbs wedged between boulders. Follow the shoreline, huffing upland to the bluff trail that hugs the high head all the way to Brooks Cove. Pause. Take in the ocean's expanse, the sea's languorous swells. Appreciate the solemnity of dead firs stripped bare of leaves and bark—silvery sentinels, over-looking craggy notches, where thunderous waves crash below.

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30:VII:07

Waves crawl up the steep berm
flipping round flat stones
heads over tails,
then retreat, claws extended,
kneading sand.

Giggling children
run down to water's edge,
then turn tail,
screaming with delight
at cold foam's caress.

You, meanwhile, snooze
and read, read
and snooze, umbrella
shading your head

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from high noon sun,
sizzling sand's heat
penetrating the blanket
you lie upon.

The frigid sea beckons,
but you decline the invitation,
knowing better—a fist to the chest
that would take your breath away.

To leave or stay,
that it is the question?
Flip a coin; heads or tails.
You call it, I say.
Your nearness
is all I require.

To stay or to leave?
You call it.
Your nearness
is all that I require

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31:VII:07

Q: What do Revlon nail polish and Buick automobiles have in common?

A: Pearl essence, derived from Lubec herring scales, supplies the shine.

—#16, from “Things About Lubec You Didn’t Know Till Now!”

Where visitors from away (us among them) now wander the sleepy main street, herring, purse-seined in Nova Scotia, were once off-loaded by the hogshead via wooden sluice into these rickety, plank and beam structures perched on pilings. First brined in salt-crustured tubs that needed regular “spudging,” the fish were then “sticked” through gill and mouth in strings of twenty and left to drain on racks. Carted to the smokehouse, the strings were then lofted to the rafters and slowly cured over charcoal fires, dusted with sawdust set to smolder with a splash of kerosene. Taken down after the flesh had turned golden, finally, the heads and tails were removed with sharp scissors by women, wearing leather aprons, who “skunned” and packed them in wooden boxes lined with wax paper. Men down the line men nailed on lids and stamped the boxes for shipment to New York, Boston, San Francisco, San Juan, Puerto Rico: *McCurdy’s Smoked Atlantic Herring, Lubec, Maine.*

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1:VIII:07

Cloud Inventory

Rude-boy clouds
blown in by the West Wind,
sporting Mohawk hairdos.

Rubenesque billows at sunset—
full figures
softened by the roseate glow.

Wads of cotton batting,
wind-pasted to the ridges
of Grand Manan’s distant bluffs.

Wispy strands, high above the horizon, combed back for that period look
in a Pat Boone flip.

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3:VIII:07

Days of cloudless skies and cut glass air
now are distant memories
obscured by draperies of mist, alternating with fog—
fog “thick as oatmeal with a splash of milk stirred in.”

Fisherman ahead of me at the gas pump,
taps last drops from the nozzle,
fixes me with his gaze and,
without cracking a smile, offers:
“Best two weeks all summer.”

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Coda:

“The summer visitors come to town with a clean shit and a ten-dollar bill,
and never change either all summer.” —Lubec saying *from 200 Years of
Lubec History, 1776-2006.*