

## Wilderness House Literary Review 6/3

*John Abbott*  
**Pennsylvania Avenue, 1987**

We were collecting bottlecaps  
Under the bleachers  
When we heard the sound  
Of cars  
Colliding  
Horns blasting  
And I felt the shifting of air  
As our parents turned  
Their heads to watch the crash,  
Spilling beer or peanuts  
Into our messy cowlicked hair  
I remember the metal on metal  
Scrape continued  
As car after car rear ended  
One another in what we later  
Learned was the biggest crash  
On Pennsylvania Avenue

The bleachers emptied quicker  
Than any bench clearing fight  
The outfielders dropped their gloves  
And ran to the road  
But the first man on the scene  
Was another driver, a man  
Headed the opposite way  
In a utility truck

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My memory is so clear  
Up until this point  
The moment when the man  
Saw the person inside  
The first far  
But after his face crumpled  
And he let out a scream  
Of recognition

Time stopped for me  
As it must have done  
For him

I knew my mind  
Wouldn't let me  
Remember anymore  
Not even whether the players  
Returned to the field  
And us boys to the cool  
Dark space under  
The bleachers

**Channeling**

There's this river  
I know that only  
exists in summer  
fed on June rain  
meteor showers and  
the occasional glut  
of blackberry wine.

It flows from swamp  
to bog picking up  
all the plans we've  
made and then  
tossed aside, channeling  
them underground along with  
blueprints for an untamed season.

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### Kin

The boy she calls cousin  
Is really her brother  
Only she don't know  
Never knew their unfit mother  
Or smelled her whisky breath  
Or felt the slap  
Of her bony, nicotine stained fingers

And this knowledge, the fact  
That their mama gave up  
Her daughter so she could have  
Something more,  
Is something  
the boy won't share  
or tell  
he'll never say why  
he treat her different  
than other cousins  
skinny flat chested girls  
he like to chase  
and tease till they cry

When she complains about  
The woman  
she calls mama  
He listens calmly to the list  
Of chores and groundings  
She thinks are cruel  
And when she's finished  
He tells her this,  
"She's only looking  
Out for you, girl.  
That's what mothers do."

**Summer's Garden**

The sound of a watering  
can filling up is the backdrop  
to August nights  
in the garden  
evenings spent in drowsy  
anticipation of cool October  
Fridays jackets layers  
hands in pockets  
heads raised some  
to meet the season's crush

But first we have  
to water and remember  
the sound of the earth  
slaking its thirst,  
getting its due before  
we get ours.

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### The Small Hours

Don't be sitting on the porch at two  
In the morning, that hour when thoughts warp  
To the shape  
Of the sidewalk and every passerby  
Wants something – a drink of wine, a buck or two  
Maybe just a cigarette- to carry them  
Through till morning or perhaps  
Just to their next destination

And the people who don't ask  
For something material  
Still want something, usually jumbled  
Conversation about the cats  
Climbing from the sewers or the manhole  
Covers that people sell as scrap metal  
But the ideas lack transitions and a  
Logical order to hold it all together  
And for those of us who can't sleep  
What we need most is cohesion  
A gentle rhythm of breathe in  
Breathe out to make our bodies relax  
When our mind is wandering  
Forward through the remaining hours  
Of night and into the next day  
And all it requires of us

Is it too much to ask  
That we make this journey alone?