

## Wilderness House Literary Review 6/3

*Tom Sheehan*

### **Rare Scars across the Retina**

\*Poet in the Rolling Chair  
(for Larry Eigner, RIP)

("All that is hidden will be known.")

You wore what you called the raw wounds  
of heaven like an old corporal's thin stripes,  
stripes earned in the long combat, charred  
chevrons a lolling disease had pinned on you.

All your poetry came misty, dispensed in spray,  
driveled, almost locked away for certain for ever,  
except for what note paper took on, laid out, said  
plain as day what you had to say about gray skies,

tide-bulky ledges, thin horizon slicing daylight's  
enormous promise, oil-slicked puddles owning  
dyed coin, all out your near-beach window; inside,  
where it all counted, frustration of one clear word

you fought forever to deliver free of spittle, odd lot's  
drool, your lips parting in deep breath's annunciation.  
That we listened, on the edge of all that's auditory  
and wet at the same time, for God truth of eons,

for zippy spark or ignition by which we full-damned  
our own laziness and ineptitude, for a Christ vowel  
to spill from your lips out of unknown places where  
you had taken yourself, was keyed by our silence.

Believe, Larry, whatever form you're in now, dry at  
pronouncements, chin stiff as a breeze you loved  
one April at Kings' Beach, head no longer bobbing  
on a weakened rubber band, your fingers pointing

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to each one of us from a new mount of rocks, dais  
of the long-timed maimed and tortured by twisted  
nerves' great disorders, of those risen finally  
from pain of not being understood at the first

whack of words, whose minds moved on wheels  
(for you became what you saw by others' hands),  
we hear, at slow moonwalk, the tide easing  
and ceasing its long monotone, world falling

away from what was so important this morning,  
at first a soft *A* your tongue lets go of, lower lip  
dropping with quick control, your commendable  
chin with it as partner, then lip-clasping *Man*

and letting go a pursed *with* that demands  
tongue against tooth and air's small escape  
so that the *V* of *Voice* will require your dark  
teeth on lower lip before you loose the naming.

If I struggle now because I struggled then, think  
lightly of me and without disdain, for I tried  
to lean with you those days and nights you moved  
at everybody else's hands, grim suitcase of poems

moving along with you, rare upward alloys  
coming up pure on bond, as if some other god,  
some other Muse of the Fourth or Fifth Century,  
searching your eastern desert, put a hand on you.

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### \*\*In the Middle

In the middle of an I-95  
breakdown lane I saw the dog,  
Labrador black and heavy,  
rent up and down like an old box,  
sheared at blunt edges of a bumper.

Color-broaching needles,  
whole fistfuls of them,  
probed behind my eyes  
for recognition, for pain.  
Then I saw the boy  
astride a meshed guardrail,  
his forehead pushing down  
on the cement guard pole,  
an inversion of Atlas  
hung up on a raw April day  
of new dimension.

A long-gone pain, old as  
trees, kicked my chest;  
esophagus stuffed itself  
with memories, bone-  
wrench impact of another time.  
I heard the frail touch  
of tears on far ground,  
screech of taxi tires  
coming off the pavement  
of a road I travel now  
in dreams, dog's last pant  
wet in my hand.

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I found half an hour  
and my beaten duffel bag,  
cached away in the van  
secret as campaign ribbons,  
gave up an O. D. blanket  
a moth had buried itself in  
waiting the resurrection.

I gave the blanket  
to the boy to the dog  
to a hole in the ground  
behind a house in Georgetown.  
He walked away wordless,  
a prisoner caught up for a while  
in other freedoms.

And I found my thirteen-year  
old eyes, the unjaded beauty  
of them, before girls  
and spiraling footballs  
and quiet battle losses  
deepened them with  
distant stars.

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\*\*\*Burial for Horsemen

(For my father, blind too early.)

The night we listened to an Oglala life  
on records, and shadows remembered  
their routes up the railed stairway like  
a prairie presence, I stood at your bed

counting the days you had conquered.  
The bottlecap moon clattered into your  
room in vagrant pieces...jagged blades  
needing a strop or wheel for stabbing,

great spearhead chips pale in falling,  
necks of smashed jars rasbora bright,  
thin flaked edges tossing off the sun.  
Under burden of the dread collection,

you sighed and turned in quilted repose  
and rolled your hand in mine, searching  
for lighting only found in your memory.  
In moon's toss I saw the network of your

brain struggling for my face the way you  
last saw it, a piece of light falling under  
the hooves of a thousand horse ponies,  
night campsites riding upward in flames,

the skyline coming legendary.

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### \*\*\*\*Men at Watering

Men at watering divine  
the pulse in it, douse petals  
much as root work, believe  
them cleaner, deserving.

In hill shanks, between  
Others' houses, as August  
suns filter down, these men  
let go, how thick hawsers

unwind in naval dusk.  
Often they train harshly  
on leaf, stubborn blade,  
and lose the water's act.

They stare at that fighting  
back. When twilit cars  
pass in salute, slowed by  
evening's deed, watering

men fix where water empties  
itself, at earth-damp,  
at the heeded and awful  
promise of return.

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\*\*\*\*Ode to a Rising Sun

Out of the edge of earth,  
out of choice darkness mixed with silt  
and angry acids that form of fire,  
out of secret caverns rocking in the deep,  
out of stone moving liquefied  
which is but a sea we float on,  
out of distance,  
out of death-wracking night,  
out of fear of childhood,  
out of nightmares and terror shrieks,  
out of ignorance, out of shame of thoughts  
sitting like pebbles on the soul,  
dark black pebbles,  
out of the songs of frenzied air,  
out of the mouth of monster bird  
cast from an angry god's hands,  
freed from the moon at endless wait,  
escaping from a debtor's prison  
partly in rags and partly in pain,  
heaved upward like a mason's block  
to the next tier of gray waiting,  
on the hilltop comes the sun.

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Before it, pell-mell fleeing,  
scudding down alleyways,  
across corners, stoops,  
half granite walls  
where houses used to be,  
through windows and mirrors  
and the wiliest of laces  
where night collects itself  
in a host of aromas, the shadows  
go quickly before the miracle  
hunting them down, at chase,  
at wild pursuit, leaping one wall  
to the next, one huge lunge  
across barriers, time, as if breath  
will expire too quickly again.

I listen. The sizzle starts:  
limbs grating each other. Horns  
and klaxons announcing.  
Clocks unwinding. Linens cracking  
their sheer porcelain deposits  
only odors can tell of.  
Percolators, motors, engines,  
dynamos, all huffing and puffing  
and snorting Orion away.  
Pulses and electricity  
beating at the lines, the mad energies  
of beginnings.  
Being heard, being sound,  
being echoes and static-filling air waves.  
Being noise, 3 A.M. surprises,  
movement and energy and time happening  
to inertia and all its cached parts.  
Being life belts to jet darkness.  
Being chance. Being opportunity  
all the way into something new.



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Hardness gathers in the sunlight,  
artifacts of mining and distillery,  
elements from miner's foot and glazier's thumb,  
copper tubing and greened-up brass,  
old galvanized iron tongues still wagging, PVC  
like a saint among water carriers  
hardly getting dirty like Din Din Din,  
porcelain dishes and ewers  
with light cherry trimmings  
faint as postage stamps,  
buckets and ladles catching at breaths  
before sudden plunges down Earth's throat,  
bring morning's water to a thousand hands.

At Earth edge the worm  
shudders, recoils, goes gelatin.  
Earth shakes with a robin's sprint  
across a tympanic lawn, as if drummers'  
batons beat on.  
He spears the tubed, eyeless thing,  
soft telescopic escapee  
just now plowing into loam.  
The warning signs are warm.

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Bridges, high arcs measuring new light,  
fields and fields of steel and concrete,  
I-bars and T-bars and girders and purlings  
and struts and bolts and nuts and plates  
by the high arc, and expansion joints  
as devious as grill work  
begin to stretch their backs,  
spread a little more to east or west  
or north and south, begin to stuff  
themselves into corners barely meant for stuffing,  
cast off their chilled auras, breathe outward  
under the new caress, the touch  
of secret places, the mouth of morning  
touching where it touches best.  
Steel stretches into sunlight.  
You can hear it flex its muscles.

Windows, like incorrigible children.  
Talk back: skyscraper faces, greenhouses.  
Across the street a woman's room leaps  
with the explosion. She could be nude  
behind that glow! A car's windshield  
becomes a moving target, throws flares back  
at the enemy. Chrome answers too,  
tracer streaks of gunships, firefights,  
strafing upward from an inversion of light  
and war and outside forces and death  
of darkness; hallway corners, dank and drear  
and wet with blood, give up the fight.  
Under stairs, attics, old coal bins webbed  
and smelling of gas under a spider's collection of glass  
and flies and moths silent for eternity,  
throw in the sponge.

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Windows answer like gunshots, bomb blasts.  
Grenadiers of the dawn. Calligraphers. Signalers.  
Corps upon corps of morning glass,  
cohorts of the inner anvil, armies,  
legions of light, great stationary convoys  
basking for split seconds in eternal flame.

But then, I get warm.  
A bird, retreated on a dark bough,  
umbrellaed under leaf canopy,  
glad for morning, worm sights, a level  
of breeze he can climb on  
and part fingers of his wings on thermals,  
hellos me all inside out.  
He is crisp and clear and singular.  
He is unique and melodious and real,  
the torrents of his heart pounding  
on the slanted shelves of air, his notes  
as sure as rungs on a ladder of resonance  
lifting the aria to unknown strata,  
flinging it over the city's river slowly  
filling up with silvering day,  
cascading song and joyous light  
and the energy of a breeze,  
like a mountain being emptied  
of all its goodness.

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In the morning mountains, like sundaes  
piled high with sweet textures, explode.  
I catch the mouthy shrapnel they throw  
into the battle dawn wages.

It is rare beauty on the fly, beams  
and sunshine flares and streams and colossal  
stripes of golden air coming through clouds  
hanging loose as line-hung blankets.

Far mountains are the first to get the sun,  
heaving upward white cones of snow  
as brilliant as stars, as sure and as steady  
as old men who know all answers  
and give off such illumination.

But you there, at the crossroads of this day,  
looking across the inviolate stretch  
of gray light we suddenly find between us  
yet joining us, must also find the ignition as spectacle  
born in the rigors of yesterday's soul.

You, too, know the upshot of this new coming,  
the bird, the fire, the breath as deep as stone.

You, too, must linger where the sun warms first,  
the first warm spot of the day, the bay window  
broad as an ax sweep, a piece of porch tilted  
under a pine, a front door stoop as white as first thoughts,  
a path between corrupt oaks and sleek birches,  
a blanket where your hand falls to rest,  
the place in your eye reserved for sudden starts  
when you think all about your being is still dark  
and the nightmare is the bark of wild dogs  
crawling down the banners of your mind  
like spiders of light on the move.

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When it all goes down, when the bet  
is paid off and all markers set straight,  
the sun comes with its singular entry,  
its warm shot, its two fingers of life  
into the glass, as well as every dark  
alley waiting the mercies found in light.