

Wilderness House Literary Review 6/4

John Sierpinski
Miracle

A skinny guy
in a greasy Brewers cap
sits on the cement base
that supports
the golden arches.
He scratches his bristled chin,
sucks on a generic cigarette, and
looks up
into the old, slate
November sky.

A heavy woman,
arms akimbo,
hovers over him.
She raises one hand
to point a broken fingernail
between his eyes
like a crystal, blue automatic.
She is telling him something
that anyone could hear
if they wanted to.

He nods, twice, in the heavy air
then edges over
to give her more room.
Their toddler in her
pink snowsuit
squats in a pile of black snow,
and shrieks.
A siren wails and
punches red, blue, yellow
under the fog shrouded bridge.

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Morning Dog

The retreating Labrador
brushes by his legs.

"Get me a towel,
give me the stain remover,"
he says. "I've already put
it on," she says, "and I'm

running late." "Well, you
didn't use enough, and then
blot it." She swallows hard,
her mouth tightens, "I read
the directions on the package."

"It's not right. You need

to read them again." His
face is turning red.

"Damn!" she shouts.

"Then you do it!

I have to leave."

"All I'm trying to tell you

is that you have to read..."

Mitsy, her tail curled down
between her hind legs,
stands by the back door.

Her dry, hot nose points
to her chest as she
retches, again.

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Salmon: A Letter

Dear Roberta,

Do you remember in July when we watched the salmon struggle up the poor river, gasp and finally hit the rocks? I tried to give it a helpful nudge with my foot, but you cried, "Leave it alone!" Then it disappeared. Later, someone told me that when salmon die they rot from the inside. That's true, by the way.

A few days later when we sat in my car you told me, "I can't do this any longer." Then you tossed your head back, dramatically, and moved it from side to side before saying, "The therapist I've been seeing told me that I need to move on." You slammed the car door. You disappeared.

A month later it was New Years Eve. I was at the singles' dance with Ginny because I was lonely. I didn't want to be with her. I just wanted to be with you. Let's just say Ginny screwed me over, money again. Then her kid thought I was Santa Claus, and tried to whine his way into the video game world. Well anyway, it was the dreaded turn of the century, anxiously anticipated, and a real dud. You were right there wearing your best bogus smile. You saw me, even said, "Hi," and then said, "All the good looking guys are at the bar, I'm going to be assertive, tonight."

I didn't even want to be at that dumb dance. The glassed in ballroom kept getting smaller and smaller. I'd been with Ginny since the darkest day of the year, but it was pitch black that night. Since I'm not going to mail this, I might as well tell you how hurt I felt.

Way back in November when I started seeing a therapist,

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you began to mess with me. "I'm seeing a shrink," I confessed. "All he ever wants to talk about is masturbation. Whenever he says that word his mustache moves up and down." "Good for you," you enthused. Then, "Maybe you should work on it," you said and smiled. I just stood there in the parking lot in my wet shoes. I'd seen the "this is the end" look before.

Now, it's the New Year. The sleepless nights are spilling like dominos. Well, I guess I'm telling you that I'm back in the basement while I'm writing this. I actually feel I still miss you. I've become the "dumpee" and you've become the "dumper". In the meantime, the windows are filling up with snow, and my heart with all of the crap you've given me. It's filled up so hard it aches. And if you think that's madness, you should see my bedroom. One last time.

Yours truly,
Mike.

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Sonny's Bar at Closing Time

Sonny Weber was a big man, built like a football lineman. When he talked, stones tumbled into a downspout. Sonny owned and ran the bar catering to the young and the senseless. At closing time he'd shout, "Okay, everybody outta the pool!" Then fluorescent lights twisted faces into distorted masks. It was as if they needed to be pressed, and put away. In the meantime, the coolers were locked,

neon beer signs shut off, and the loud, thumping music unplugged. Bouncers, muscles, pushing through tee shirts, waded into the curl of smoke. Beer reeked.

More than a few nights those pituitary cases had to step between clenched faces and slack jaws. A half dozen times I witnessed a nose spray red. Once my own eyes were punched shut while my hands dangled at my sides. I had said,

"You can't talk that way to my buddy."

Another night a crowd gathered while two drunks, one of them myself, carried an inebriated, young lady like a hammock through the bar. Unfortunately, (or maybe fortunately for some) her top slid up, her face slid down while her breasts remained perky. All I know is that I became one of the glassy-eyed. More than one night I stumbled out that door, and into my dented,

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old car. There in the dark, I heard over and over the click, click, clink and ping of my key, as it fumbled for the ignition.

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Six Gallery, 1955

Crazy Neal Cassady and Gregory
Corso raced across the room
shouting, "Yes!" Jack Kerouac
tapped out a rhythm on a gallon
wine jug, William Burroughs
collected money for more. Gary
Snyder sat in a lotus position
while Allen Ginsberg chanted

and read about the madness
of the best minds of his generation,
"Howl". 1955, shit, I was in early
grammar school. I wouldn't make
it out to San Francisco until 1965,
and all I had in grade school were
black and white television images:
dark glasses, goatees, leotards,

bad jazz, bongos, snapping
fingers, horizontally striped
pirate shirts, black berets,
beatniks, sputnik. It wasn't
until a Midwest high school where
I read poetry, tried to write my
own, then read about what had
gone down in that coffeehouse

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on Fillmore. Finally, I wandered
North Beach in a fog, on a Friday
night. I stood inside City Lights
books (Vesuvios' bar wouldn't
let me in. "Underage," the bartender
declared). Having already appropriated
and swilled a poor boy bottle of wine,
I swayed, stumbled past a drunken

woman leaning against a dumpster
and being pawed by a sailor. Down
the absurdly hilly blocks, by topless
and bottomless bars, an unshaven
man in a worn, stained sport coat
with his dirty hand demanding
money from my own young hand,
finally into early Saturday morning

mist on Market street. I walked
away from the porn shops, the pawn
shops, and discount stores-all-closed,
headed back to Folsom street and my
room. Near a cable car stop I spotted
the sailor's woman. I said, "I want
to be a writer." She said, "I'm still
a little drunk." We were on our way

to my room in the Baker hotel. It
might have been the Dylan record I
put on the cheap turntable or it might
have been the joint she pulled out
of her purse, or it could have been
the used copy of "Howl" she left
on the night stand. Anyway, I got
it, I wanted it, and at least I thought

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I had it. Then there was the war.
Instead, I chased back to Milwaukee,
went to college, only dreamed
of beats, became a hippie and carried
my burden on my second hand suede
sleeve. On a visit to my parent's house
I recall my father putting down his
newspaper with a great, crumpled

flourish, and while staring at the now
color TV said, "You don't even realize
what you're doing. Those kinds
of people are just plain goofy." I
decided right then and there that I
would always look to women for help.