

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/1

Moriah Erickson

Conversation with my Father

is hard to come by. I call
the house I grew up in
to chat with my mother,
who has nothing to say,
her wispy voice uncertain.
She likes to hear my voice
now and then, make sure all is right.

He presses the phone,
still tethered to the wall
by pigtail cord, to his good ear
and doesn't say much but "hello" and "hold on."

Sometimes, when he feels particularly lonely
or bored, he engages me in what he considers
witty banter, making jokes
about changing his diapers.

This talk makes me flush,
uncomfortable with the thought of him ever needing me
as much as I needed him, and I ask
to talk to my mother, who I am sure is standing right there
listening to him in her silent way,
hand out, foot tapping,
waiting for the receiver.

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He laughs, hollow, a sad and knowing sound
and hands it over
without saying goodbye,
and never "I love you"
and I recover
slowly, as my mother
flutters about making her moth sounds
as her wings brush the flame
of his missing words.