

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/1

Richard Perkins II **Diary of a Sensitive Youth**

In Cody

I remember the woman with no teeth who was crying.
I wanted to give her a couple of cigarettes
or maybe even the whole pack
but then I wouldn't have any, so I kept them,
and I moved on.

In Spokane

I was living at the park with the other homeless people.
Me and my friend were showing off
to the college girls that passed by
but I got tired of that
so I climbed a cliff about thirty feet high
and when I stood on top I could see the whole city
and when I looked down I saw a kid about my age
wearing black Converse shoes
his body covered by a ripped orange tarp.
His hands were on his stomach, cradling his severed head
and I said, well, at least you can't feel anything—
but I wasn't sure who I was talking to.
I couldn't speak for a couple of days after that
and one night, by the fire,
I noticed that I was wearing black Converse shoes,
wrapped in an orange poncho
and I knew that I would never talk again
if I stayed there, so I got up,
and I moved on.

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Outside Spokane

I gave a woman my last five dollars because she looked like
the woman in Cody who I wanted to give cigarettes to.

But even after she had the money,
people still turned their heads from her in shame
and I thought, what difference does this really make?

Five dollars might last half-a-day
and then she'll still be the same anyway.

I was totally broke now, and I wished
I hadn't given away all my money, so I made a note,
and I moved on.

In Denver

I was sleeping at a friend's place
when I heard gunfire and jumped up and remembered
oh yeah, this is Denver, and went back to sleep
not too bothered by the drive-by-shooting.

In the morning

I heard that a little boy had been shot in the crossfire.

I was sad in a way
and wanted to do something to help.

Three weeks later, I was still there,
unable to think of any way to help, but I heard
he had gotten better anyhow and I felt better,
so I lit-up a found, half-cigarette, inhaled,
and began moving on.

Clinging

For three days
I've carried you
on my back
even though
you keep falling off.

Unhurt,
I help you
atop my shoulders
once more
praying
that you'll cling
to me so tightly
my hair will
tear out in clumps.

Your tiny body
keeps falling though—
my special child.
At last
I hide you
beneath the roots
of an ancient tree
that the scavengers
might not desecrate you.

In eulogy,
I preen knots
from your monkey fur
and leave only
when the leopard scent
grows too near.

Stolen Moments in Araby

Lawrence jumps out of the poem
forgetting to put on a shirt.
This is a bus station.
Lawrence looks in the pockets
of his jeans for a trinket
of lost faith.
This is a bus station in the desert
which might be somewhere
near San Diego.
The sun flickers around his head
like a proverbial moth.
His feet are bare and getting warm.
There are no shoes in his pockets.
Those would have helped.
A moth flies straight
into the proverbial sun
of a darker poem.
In the real world,
Lawrence tries again.
Behind the teller's window
is an arboretum where tickets
grow on trees.
A sign says:
No Shoes, No Shirt, No Service.
He can't be sure if he's
going somewhere or if
he's already arrived.
Lawrence looks once more
in the pockets of his jeans
for something to believe in;
a ticket or a simple rhyme
crumbled deep in the pockets
of the blue pants
which are not his own.

Return of the Perfect Object

That object retrieved from the sea
which might be love—

quite out of place in the arid world,
so that if we didn't know better,
we might call it pearl, or doubloon,
or even trilobite—
but we know it cannot be these things,
so we call it *love*, set it on the
cabin table and further label it *ours*.

Seen against the maculate horizon,
its appearance changes with each
subtle flirtation of the water—
and our conviction wavers as well,
so we rename our treasure,
calling it *jealousy* or *ego*,
and we further clutch it between us,
deciding if it is *mine* or *yours*.

Ominous arrival,
a silent arm of tide curls over
the sailing craft, reclaiming the object
we once thought of as love,
now worn as bracelet of the waves—
nothing more than salvage or haul
for weekend tourists
on a chartered yacht cruise
out of Miami Beach.

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Looking for another existence
and the remainder of the world,
we found something flourishing
at the bottom
of a bejeweled, thieving ocean—

the fossil-lives of recognizable others
kept in the immutable state
which we would likely call *perfect*.

Lost Illinois Pastoral

Now it is dark.
Glorious worlds of fireflies
lie scattered
on harsh, hungry pavement.
Phosphorescent bulbs burnt out
they crawl blindly
across oily blackness
at the edge of cricket night.

Croaking birds disappear,
dancing down into
the soul of Earth,
descending through the silent pond—
an unwavering monocle,
sentinel of falling dust
and bloody reeds

where a swan floats alone,
tender and sore,
dying in the blue shadows
at the side of an access road
no one uses anymore
except us
and a troupe
of harlequin nightingales
nesting in the throat of the world.

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Beyond the Edge

Her contrasts skim and rustle
quite unprepared for this peculiarity.

Gazing past a startle of phrasing
the world has things to be saddened by.

As a death scream
she has exploded them from her body

gusting among reeds, teeming full,
every word breathes rain, a black swan flows.

Is it over?
Have we come so far —

speak the minders of a benediction,
her risen soul.

Heroic deeds are now pointless,
no smile adorns her golden-age fugue.

The woman is more than perfected —
she is the slightest hairline perfection.

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Dowry Chest

A short note hidden in an ornamental seam,
placid for five generations like the tree
father found and felled for your box of cedar.

A shaving of thought recounting
the first hours of marriage,
the singularity of your husband's home.
Like your rampant spirit,
the letter will be secreted within a familiar chest.

Emptied, it yawns beneath the glass
Gustav etched and silvered for your marriage gift.
From faraway Kiruna, he journeyed to the wedding
and sledded away ten minutes after the ceremony,
pulled by the lodestone of some unseen star.
Everyone left so quickly.

Like the muteness of woods after a pine is taken,
this house is disturbingly quiet,
quite unlike the home of your birth
with its hue of energetic patter.
Soon though, you'll begin to enliven these rooms
with your own children, their small fables.

Thyra and Tekla will laden their dowries
with silk and bronze.
Karl, with his face of glowering iron,
will become the village smith.
But first, to fold your pale thoughts in eighths
and place them safely away.

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Bold musings are all you retain from your first life.
To your new husband you have given everything else,
even this, a small remembrance
in a future too distant
to have ever considered.