

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/1

William Doeski

My Father's Pea Soup

The pea soup my father brewed
years before his death remains
our primary source of nourishment.
Scoop a bowlful, heat it
over a wood fire. Microwave

won't touch it. The gas range
doesn't impress it. The view
from our fourth-floor apartment
doesn't even skim its surface.
We have to tote it to the park

and break off rose bush and lilac
and stoke a fire under the pot.
The police take so long to arrive
that we've heated it and eaten
and returned to our love-nest

before the patrol car screeches
into the park and shudders.
You'd like to save up and buy
a bag of ordinary groceries,
but respect for my late father

requires us to finish his soup.
The bucket isn't bottomless,
but the soup expands with age,
renewing itself. Eat faster
in larger bowlfuls and maybe

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/1

someday we can deplete it.
If we don't, it will crawl
from the pail some grisly night
to smother and digest us.
Of course I'm only teasing.

It's ordinary pea soup, green
as your eyes and innocent
of all but vegetable desires,
its vitamin content unimpeached,
its vitality purely benign.
The Magi Seem Authentic

Setting out feeders and scattering
cracked corn for turkeys, I sample
the cold like a new Beaujolais.
Sip, swill, spit out into the gray.
Chemical warfare in Syria,
a man pushed from a subway platform
to die a crescent-shaped death.

No wonder the oncoming rain
feels personal as an insult.
No wonder my cigar-shaped breath
clots into fog and falls in the grass.
If a white Christmas should arrive
it will mean a total erasure.
Still, the Magi seem authentic,

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/1

struggling across the outer fringe
of the Roman Empire to bring
their produce to impress a child.
If I could mount a camel
without laughing and losing balance
I'd join them to make a foursome.
As I turn to re-enter the house

the turkeys dash from the woods
to peck corn and roll in the dirt.
Yesterday two slept upside-down
in a bed of pine needles. Their feet
were pronged like tuning forks. The reek
of poison will drift from Syria
to spoil my day of reading books

about people I never met:
Baudelaire, Robert Duncan, Cato.
Their faces will form in the cold
metallic rain, then drift away
with postmortem sighs so palpable
they could be my own, remaindered
after a night of halfhearted love.

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/1

Transvestite Generals

Transvestite generals arrive
in paisley and polka dots.
Their gray and mutual gaze
has honed itself on maps
of nations that refuse to accept

the American imperium.
Their knowledge of weapons systems
focuses on the price. I'm paid
to take notes, but this meeting
is secret, and the spectacle

of these famous and honored men
in push-up bras and high heels
freezes my intellect. Only one
of them is actually a woman,
but their upright bearings interlock

so I can't tell who is whom.
The meeting traces lines of force
from cost overruns to battlefields
where drones attack like killer bees
and the dead arrange themselves

in rows for easy counting.
I listen but write down nothing.
I'll explain to my grandchildren
how vivid these men appear
in lipstick and rouge, how tender

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/1

their grasp of their coffee cups,
how tears form in the corners
of their eyes but never fall
to streak their pancake makeup.
The generals hardly notice me.

They compliment each other's
dress and hairdo, brassy wigs
tottering like tumbleweeds.
The meeting ends with plans
to extend the wars across borders.

I fold my notebook and follow
the generals tripping from the room
and watch their girdled rumps retreat
into the depths of the Pentagon
where the greatest secrets die.

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/1

A Scenario I Expect to Sell to the Movies

The desk lamp you sent from Sweden
has fallen and smashed. The rubble
of its pottery base invokes

the Second World War, which ended
with my birth. To clean up the mess,
you lend me your latest boyfriend,

fresh from Moscow. He speaks no English,
but smiles as he wields a dustpan.
Meanwhile I'm trying to write

about the afterglow of romance,
which also invokes the Second
World War. Your grandfather died

when Germany washed over Poland.
His ghost lingers like ozone after
a lightning strike. Your boyfriend,

a gangster, shows me a pistol
made in China. Nickel-plated,
it looks almost as dangerous

as you in your professional mood.
Your State Street office festers
with clients buying mutual funds.

Their checkbooks swing like barn doors.
Their faces cringe in Florida tans.
Daybreak over Boston Harbor

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/1

smelts in cloud cover so thick
the brokers mistake it for profit.
Your boyfriend lies down on my daybed

and snores the most innocent snore.
When did you say you'd pick him up?
I heft his shiny pistol

and pretend I'm a gangster like him.
Gusts of decay drift from Europe
where the war will never forget

itself, and the harbor goes limp
in the dead of winter. Your clients
have to wait as you order me

a replacement desk lamp to light
manuscript pages intended
to flash your glory to the world.

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/1

A Circle of Folding Chairs

A circle of folding chairs
stands in a cold but snowless
December meadow. Who or what
will convene? I choose a chair
and sit. Wind has flattened the grass,
the frostbitten stalks too stiff

to flex and resist. I realize,
after a while, that the chairs
aren't vacant, that daylight ghosts
occupy several. I know them,
although their names have faded
and their faces eddy like smoke.

I'll sit awhile and try to recall
the good or bad times we shared,
but there's no use speaking
since the distance from one chair
to the next spans several decades.
I focus on a stretch of barbed wire

rusting along a fieldstone wall.
No cattle to contain, no sheep
for a cheerful border collie
to herd with quick little circles.
Not a house in sight, only a well
capped with a sheet of plywood

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/1

to keep children from falling in.
The ghosts aren't aware of me.
I'm too large and clumsy for their world,
even seated on cold metal.
Who placed these chairs here? Someone
borrowed them from a church vestry,

someone still among the living
who knew these ghosts would convene
this afternoon in this meadow.
Did I load them into my pickup
and drive them here this morning,
then return to see what has happened?

No, someone else, someone attuned
to the windy chords resounding
at year's end, someone who rhymes
the lilt of meadow with the dead
still among us, the gray light swirling
with a thousand voiceless regrets.