

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/4

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Criminal's creed

It's a bad idea to give lip to cops.
Nothing good comes of smart-ass ways.
Beat-downs are certain. Don't look to courts
for vindication. It isn't there. It's nowhere.
Hold your peace. Say nothing in answer to
smirks from faces with dark-mirrored glasses.
Even If you are in the right, it won't hold water.
They'll snap your mug just like any other.

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One true bible

On shelves thick with dust
of every police academy
you'll find a dog-eared manual –
passages highlighted,
scribbled notes
misspelled in margins –
to enlighten cops in the craft
of lying.

How to look suspects
coldly in the eye,
not blink, and cite
with confidence
statements made by
nonexistent witnesses.

Or refer to evidence
real only in forensics
labs on TV shows.

Once cops learn this dark craft,
confessions will gush.

Persons of Interest will bleed
all the information
there is to bleed as
from an open vein.

You'll hear only whispers
of this manual, if at all;
it's like a book of shadows.

Once a public defender
tried conjuring it in court.

The D.A.'s objection
curtly slammed the door.

The book wasn't divined
by veteran cops or
criminal justice professors.

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It sprang from the experts:
spouses, children, the parish
priest. Thus it is infallible,
even more so than
sacred texts. At least
to cops who find it much
more useful and cheap.

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In Memoriam

Left alone to die in county jail,
His body enslaved to junk,
Ignored by guards despite inmates' pleas,
Dying in a pool of bloody puke,
His crime – the theft of video games
Worth less than a hundred bucks
Yet more than one young addict –
Kevin M., dead at twenty-four,
No belated inquest nor apology
Nor settlement with grieving parents
Can salve the horror of his death.
May he find peace in the still earth.
The grave at least will value him
Not less or more than any other man.