

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/1

Russell Rowland
Not a Fetish Exactly

Late for an educators' conference, my love
leaves her laundry behind for me to wash.

I joke about keeping the panties out of it,
to lay upon my pillow while I sleep alone
in a bed too big for one. Such brevities
are my *inamorata's* second skin, so I claim
them as my third. She sighs, I am absurd.

I defend myself with a reference: tokens
armored chivalry asked, and was granted,
to bear at lance-point into tournaments.

She counters with adolescent panty-raids,
implying I have some growing up ahead.

The intricacies of desire are better spared
judgment, even by those inclined to look
everything suspect up in the Good Book.

There after all we find David the voyeur,
and Solomon, polygamist. Jacob steadied
a ladder meant for angels' ups and downs:
he alone was placed to see if the heavenly
host had underwear beneath their gowns.

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Perseus

Toward midnight, he lingers on the balcony
of the borrowed condo. She is asleep inside.

He has never seen such a sky: stars sprinkled
like talcum powder. Silent, a meteor passes:
late Perseid, days after their shower, named
for its radiant point in hero Perseus, bearing
the head of the slain Gorgon. Her dreadlocks
still hiss and writhe about the wrist of Perseus.

The meteor slides out of nothing, and returns
to nothing—like us, reflects the man, or like
the blade of beheading: drawn, then sheathed.

The Perseids are finished, so he comes in
from the open midnight to the close bedroom,
his half of the bed, and the gorgeous monster
slaughtered earlier in gender jihad—her head
rolling loose on a twin pillow; her last dreams,
desires, thoughts all slithering away from him.

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Closure

One more page to the current calendar!
It is time. We close the books and give
account of our stewardship. We close
the mahogany coffin lid, after viewing.

We shut our traps about what we saw
in the parlor when the rest of the house
was dark: that cannot now be helped,
and will hardly improve in the telling.

We close our minds to the temptation
of Watch Night bells rung at church,
that ball descending on Times Square:
the allure of amendment, nothing new.

Our Ma and Pa grocery store has shut
its doors for keeps. The empty space
will be carpeted, cubicled for the next
business, shilling high-interest loans.

Case closed. Our prejudices are good
for another year. The same repetitive
mistakes will yield predictable results.
The perennial candidate dyes his hair.