

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/2

Ken Wheatcroft-Pardue
In Real Life

this cold morning, in line
waiting for my daily jolt of caffeine,
I catch sight of this bum
prying his scabbed mouth from Styrofoam.

His face, beatific in coffee smoke,
reminds me of those 12th century
portraits of martyred saints,
calm blue eyes
squinting through a bric-a-brac of skin.

With the swoop of plastic,
the 21st century interrupts.
And I beat a quick retreat
past oil-spots,
wadded-up fast food trash
to my rusty crate
to do by habit
what I've done for years:
drive on, drive on, drive on.

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It is the Purest Pain When I See You Now

I wonder:

Is there any one in this whole bloody world
as pure-bred an idiot as I?

To prove it:

sometimes I swear your voice's lilt
still hovers near those broken ceiling tiles
over my Alfalfa cowlick,
above my always-harried head.

How much time did I waste
lost inside the endless labyrinth
of your Bette Davis eyes,
all-the-while contemplating your curled Madonna hands?
That were, as it turns out, insubstantial as mist.

Oh my endless daffiness,
even surprises me,
putting pencil to paper
to quantify the half-life of your hugs.

God above,
is there any one in this world
as pure-bred an idiot as I,
your stupid, stupid lapdog?

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Negative Space

Things disappear:

That candle, smelling of vanilla,
we once lit,
the round mouth over our heads,
the eyes that squinted abstractly,
both gone for good.

Even that old wreck we once drove
is now being driven by another.

Yes, copulation once thrived in the back seat,
where now a child stares out the window,
eyes like two cat's eye marbles,
yet another refugee
from the cruelty of playgrounds.

Now another drives it.

The hands that grip the wheel, perhaps, grip iron,
bending it into shapes,
but, more likely, has fingers rawed red
from pushing buttons
on some frigging keyboard all day.

By rush hour, the boredom,
the utter disgust of work
weighs on his temples,
presses against the closed windows,
bending them, outward,
slowly, almost imperceptibly,
until they burst.

Pellets of blue-green glass spray
onto the hot burning blacktop.

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Genealogy

Our ancestors were lovers.
They scratched at lace, tore bodices,
ripped flannel, beds buckled, frames collapsed.

And don't you know, it was a civic act.
You couldn't very well hide
heavy breathing in one room, could you?

Our ancestors were killers.
Their sharp bayonets found the soft skin
under countless ribs.

They hacked arms, shot at shadows,
the black powder dyeing their hands,
while someone else's blood
stained their leggings.

And what are we,
but left with this dross,
this accidental concoction,
this all-too-heady brew of ardor
mixed with equal parts brutality?