

Wilderness House Literary Review 12/3

Andrew Hubbard

Hit A Snag

He was older than old,
Lived alone, had a little pension
From the machine shop
And inherited a solid boat house
Built on pilings in five feet of water
With a ramp to dry land.

He had the basic skills of a ship-wright
And decided to build his dream ship.

The gossips said, "And why not?"
Kindly, for once in their ratty lives.

He bought some tools
And hand-carried in his lumber.

His grand-kids gave him a radio
And he listened to music two generations old.

Every day he brought in a bag
Of peanut butter and onion sandwiches
On white bread, and a twelve-pack of beer.

He planed and sanded
And sawed and nailed
And hummed with the radio,
And I don't think I've ever seen
A happier man.



He made a game
Of stomping the empty beer cans,
And another game of peeing out the window.

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Sometimes a few of the old guys
Would stop by with a pint
To talk about hunting and fishing
And women, and the old days.

If any of them saw a problem developing
They didn't mention it,
At least not in my hearing.

After two or three years
She was done, primed, stained
And every bit as lithe and beautiful
As the naked women on calendar photos
Nailed all down the side of the boat house.

And then the terrible truth
Was terribly apparent:
Her beam was three feet wider
Than the boat house doors.

She was never going to leave the boat house,
Never going to rest in water.

It sunk in on him slowly I think,
He sat in the boat
Sipping his beer
Considering ways and means.
There weren't any.

Sitting there day after day
With those shitty peanut butter & onion sandwiches
His sense of humor got a grip.

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With money he could not well afford
He had a custom sign hand-lettered
And hung on the front of the boat house:

SHIP'S REST

And he had the craft's name
Done in calligraphy on the stern:

Hit a snag

He was older than old
And no one was surprised
To find him one day
Sitting in the stern sheets
With a beer in each hand
Deader than dirt.

The gossips said he died of a broken heart
But I don't think that at all.
I think he was having his dream voyage
On his dream ship
In warm southern waters
With naked Tahitian girls
Laughing and working his sails.

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Red Pick-Up Truck

Daddy stood sticks
In the corners of the bed
And tied on a tarp
To keep the worst of the sun off us.

He laid down blue moving pads
And lifted us little girls
With our frayed cotton dresses
And brown, bony knees
Into the bed with coloring books
And a few plastic toys.

We drove up and down
That enormous stack of states
Smack in the middle of our country:
Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas,
Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota.

He was looking for work, any work,
He was desperate. One time
At this big truck stop near Tulsa
He was walking around the pump island
With a gas can, panhandling,
Begging people to put a squirt of gas in the can,
And a lady spit on him.
He came back to the truck and cried.

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About a month later in Abilene
I think he sold my sister.
She was awfully pretty
And one morning she was just gone.
That day we ate at a pizza buffet
And afterward the truck was full of gas
And the air conditioner was working.
I slept twelve hours in the cab.

The next week Dad got on
At Circle-K in Kimbal, Nebraska
And things started to get better
But real, real slowly.

First, Dad got me in middle school,
Then it was tires for the truck
And then he got his teeth fixed.
They hurt him so bad
I don't think he'd slept through a night
In five or six years.

I got a fake ID for my age
And a job part-time as a cashier.

Dad found weekend work on a ranch.

We bought a house, tiny,
But it had a real kitchen and bathroom.
We got a table and chairs at a yard sale
Beds at Goodwill, and a television
From a pawnshop in Cheyenne.

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My boss gave me a dog
And I learned that every trait
We work toward as a person
Comes natural to a dog.

Over the next couple of years
We got real bedding, a sofa,
Good plates and glasses
Drapes, rugs, and towels.

I'm the assistant manager now,
I'm finishing junior college
And I think all the time
About what I couldn't before:
What happened to my sister?

I want to talk to Dad about it
But he's over fifty now
And he's got the dementia.
He disremembers that I have a sister,
Or he's lying,
I can't really tell.

I try to imagine her all glamorous
In a big house with lots of children
But the picture won't come clear,
I guess my mind knows it's not likely.

I talk to her in my head all the time
And the thing I say most is,
"I'm ok, I'm doing all right,
And I so hope you are too.
I hope to god."