

Wilderness House Literary Review 13/1

Tree Riesener
Fireworks

You load the pipe and suck in the fireworks. Whistling missiles, slithering sparks, shivering teases, dripping embers illuminate all your dark places. You fall asleep with flashing neon outside and the Fourth of July in your veins. When you wake up, your room is the saddest place of all the sad places in a world's worth of cold grey winter.

Shiver, heave off the bed. Smooth out the the glittering mini. Pizza at the corner, toke in the back room, rush hour by the time you hit the streets. Smart and sassy when cars slow down. In between, sag back against the wall. Baby's packing on molecules, adding limbs.

Straighten up and shake your hair back, flash a big smile as the next car goes by and then screeches to a stop.

"Hi, sweetheart! You lookin' for some fun?"

Sunday mornings, nice and slow. Eggs McMuffin, Dunkin' Donuts. Hot strong coffee, milk and sugar. Shampoo, cartoons, preachers.

You could keep her, imagine it. In the hospital, all the doctors and nurses can't hardly keep their hands off her. The room all white, matching ribbons, her in your arms and everything so happy.

Get somebody in while you work. No trouble at all with those little jars of food. Fold-up stroller from the Nearly New. Sundays, take a walk. Everybody'd stop to talk and not just guys. Other mothers. Grandmothers. Everybody likes a nice clean baby.

Rattles and toys. Later, her own little TV. Sesame Street and Barney. Talk shows. Ellen and Oprah. Learn to talk, good vocabulary.

You turnin' your nose up at me, creepo? Rat trap like that, wouldn't go with nobody in a rat trap like that. Always weirdos wanta go with somebody's showin'. Back's achin', night goin' on forever. Wish I was home. There you go, creepo, slow down, way to go. Heya, handsome.

Wind starts to chill, and stores put out their Christmas lights, but you and the fireworks keep going until baby bursts out in a squall as loud as a skyrocket and then, when he feels the cold and the greyness, shakes and screams with rage.

Work harder, get more money. Bigger apartment, fancy sneakers, video games. Pull yourself up the last flight dark from another smashed bulb, take a break at the top, wish you could just slip in, crawl under the quilt. Stand up, take a deep breath and turn your key, want to cry when you see the bruises, the bloody lip. For what? Running in the wrong direction, dropping the ball, making them lose the game.

Longing for sleep with all your heart, you sit down and try to cuddle his resisting body. Not his fault, there's fire in his veins, but your baseball

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days are far away, and you wish you could say, look, never mind. In a few years, it's not gonna matter. If you only knew what a little bit of time we play baseball, and then we depend on fireworks, gunpowder, crack, crack, crack but hey, you say, this is somethin' your mom can definitely help you with. Did you know I was a champion baseball player? Hey, did you? Look up at me. I ain't puttin' you on. I know all about baseball. Come on, you. We're gonna solve your problem.

You jump up, rummage in the kitchen drawer for the red, white and blue boxes.

The metal of the fire escape is cold, and he curls his toes. You bring the old quilt out and spread it over the landing, strike match after match to the sparklers, toss the first few high in the air, let them fall end-over-end down to the alley, lean over to see the final glowing segments lying in the garbage-littered alley far below.

What you have to do is all laid out waitin' for you, you say. That's what baseball is like. The whole game is just there waitin' for you, and you run through the pattern that opens up, like this. You've gotta see the whole thing, and then you'll be a good player.

You write largely on the night sky with your glowing sparkler.

Look, there's the batter. There's the pitcher. There's the shortstop. See, all in a line to move the ball along. Then here, and here, and here are first base, second and third. See? Just remember the fireworks, and you'll be a real good player.

You take a drag and let the explosions inside burn up your exhaustion. Let me try, he begs, and you let him have just one puff. Fireworks zip and zing all over and around the iron balcony while he learns the pattern.

Dawn creeps in while the instructions hang on the night air. Toward the end, you sit together on the quilt and pull it up around your shoulders. You know you need to feel more fireworks, but for a while you'll be able to make it on the glow in your heart.

Mother and son here learnin' together, you think, mother and son together. You don't want anything to change, so you just light the last few one at a time and watch until they burn all the way to the end before tossing them over the railing, and after a while, when you have no more sparklers, you curl up together in the soft quilt nest and sleep for a while in each other's arms.