

## Wilderness House Literary Review 14/3

*Toti O'Brien*  
**PART OUT**

ALL ABOUT IT HAS THE FLAVOR OF A PROPER BURIAL.

I have proceeded with determination and purpose from the start. I did not get discouraged along the way. I didn't seek help. I wanted to dispatch this business by myself.

I have prepared the old car—no more worth to be repaired, engine on the verge of collapsing, a ghost—for retirement, following the steps required by State regulations. Once the mechanical checks were done and the paperwork completed, I have carefully emptied the vehicle of my belongings.

Cleaning it took time, and was kind of strange. I resisted it.

I have experienced this with houses. Who hasn't? The divesting of unanimated property is weird. It is vaguely obscene, a kind of violation in reverse... Shouldn't we feel aggressive, intrusive, when we invade a neutral and virgin space (room, garden, or vehicle) with our messy insignia? It's the opposite that feels cruel to me. This undue subtraction, this abandonment of husks that have done nothing but shielding us, quietly meeting our needs.

I am not sentimental. I am pragmatic indeed, on the rough/rude side. Still.

The paperwork due for the car to be retired—and a refund received—is quite complex. The whole process is lengthy. That has let me approach my unloading in gingerly fashion. Front seats. Back seats. Glove box then side pockets. Maps. CDs. Trunk, in various installments.

The keys aren't in my purse anymore. They have been replaced. To fetch them from where I have stored them, then put them back away, has been like a ritual—sort of 'let's get ready and go pay the old darling a visit'.

In the past I have parted with vehicles faster, selling them simultaneously to my new purchase. Selling them for parts if in bad shape, and for little money but quickly—to make room in my driveway, without afterthoughts.

This car isn't special. I suppose it has lingered just because I have pursued the bucks from the government—the refund they'll cash out when I'll deliver the spoils—instead than other options. That's all.

But I have gone through the cleaning task slowly, with surprising reverence. Respect, reverence aren't emotions, correct? I don't know what they are. I know where they lay. Very deep. All of this has the taste of a proper burial.

Once requirements are met I get my appointment and a checklist of what I should bring, I should do on delivery day.

I am scared. Plainly afraid that the engine-on-the-verge-of-collapse will expire at the wrong moment—while I am on my way or else on location, under the eye of the clerk to whom I'm supposed to show an almost-dead-but-still-running item.

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I am fearful that something won't be right and I will have to drive or tow the car home, burdened with the embarrassment of finding another kind of disposal.

I am nervous about the possible disappointment of not getting the money, though I'm not counting on it. Not until I see it.

I am wary of the opposite scenario as well... of the car being accepted and of my consequent, sudden carless status, if brief. Of being far from home and having to find a lift.

My anxieties are pathetic, I know.

As I drive the car—hopefully for the last time—the temperature gauge marks the perfect spot, in the middle. And so does the gasoline gauge, displayed on the other side of the dashboard. Half full! I feel joyful. Those two needles I have carefully watched for years, today are behaving nicely. What a good girl, good car.

As I drive I listen to the engine—fearing it might sputter, then cough, and then choke. I always listen to the engine, indeed. Today its sound overwhelms me. It amazes me with its consistency. Its power. It perplexes me and makes me dizzy.

I am puzzled. Something in this noise exudes purpose and determination. And it is—more important—coherent, contiguous. Synchronous, it works in solidarity. With me, I mean. With my heart, my breathing, my pulse, my own sound. We are the same. Concerted. Concerned, are we?

The engine seems to be concerned about me, about safely bringing me where I am directed. Well, what a discovery! Hasn't it been true all along? Perhaps not. Perhaps our alliance, our symbiosis was only mechanical, automatic until now. Why should things change at last, when the two of us are about to split?

As I drive, I notice the sky—how porous it looks, bright with the extreme shine of those days when things memorable... Not at all. Bright with the extreme, unbearable shine the sky sports whenever it likes, but I only notice on days when remarkable things occur, because those are the days when I notice things.

Today I'm noticing things. Pointedly, the sky—how it burns, it scorches, and it's simultaneously cold.

All goes well with the paperwork and the engine behaves through the proceeding. I will get a check when the routine is over. It takes time. At some point we are weighted (the car and I) on a scale. Then I am weighted alone. Then I am subtracted from the car—my weight is deducted from the combined weight of my vehicle and body. Other things are performed, until finally I park where I am told and I leave the keys inside.

Afterwards, I call for a friend to give me a ride home and I sit in a sort of picnic area—like a kid waiting for pick-up in the schoolyard. Wind is blowing away a few clouds. The air is crisp.

Blue.

I was asked by the employee, among other questions. This one caught me unprepared.

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Which color?

The car?

Yes, of course.

Blue.

The answer spilled naively out of my lips. It felt personal, as if we were speaking of eyes... The question felt useless. If the car is going to be a cube of metal in minutes, does its color matter? It felt needless, the question, therefore inappropriate.

As I wait I am bothered by the sky that, swept clean, glares ostensibly with the brash luminosity—oh, yes—of those days when things remarkable happen. Things pivotal.

On those days I also notice people and places, though the most irritating, no doubt, is the atmosphere around and above me, poised with ineluctable vibes.

But I notice folks as they arrive to this spacious precinct, scanty built, sparse, agoraphobic—piles of crushed metal looming in the background with the shimmer of distant waves. I see people looking around in confusion, not sure where to go, where to park—paperwork fluttering in their hands like sails guiding their tentative route.

They get in and out of their vehicles as I have done a short while ago. Each of them has come to deliver four wheels—quite a trivial duty. Even so, because this is the last of something, everybody is cocooned, wrapped and haloed by a nuance of finality.

With the corner of my eye I still see the car. Soon it will be lifted by one of those monster tractors and destroyed. This is what I have brought it for. This is why I am paid. Which feels—let's admit it—like a Judas' deal.

Said without sentimentality, I swear. I know how to sort human from unanimated matter. I don't anthropomorphize. But you can be a Judas to non-sentient entities, and it is the same as it comes to qualify your doing. Mine, in this case.

I look at my car, unchanged—which, I guess, means innocent—orderly and obediently parked as always, in wait. Like a dog expecting its walk, my car waits to go places, to run. Engine, sound, heartbeat, rumble, pulse, guts, entrails, circulation... goodbye.

This ignorance objects are condemned to. This blunt unawareness. As if I, as if someone should let them know. This ignorance, fragile, makes a Judas of me.

Take it easy. Bye bye, blue car. I will linger on faux-feelings no more.

I have given to this old car a neat, proper burial and I have been paid in exchange. Shouldn't it feel good? Like a legacy. As if, not content of having served me so faithfully...

I detest the word 'serve'. Not content of having supplied unconditional solidarity, the car left me a present as well. A last hug. Last kiss.

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Now the accountant to whom I ask if this sum qualifies as income, tells me that because it is so much smaller than the price I initially paid, it is actually a loss. This is great for tax purposes but it doesn't correspond to reality, does it?

This is a gain, I am sure. Or a gift, as I have said. A gift, to be exact, for which I should be grateful to someone, to something.