

Wilderness House Literary Review 17/1

Joanne Corey

We probably should have taken off

his wedding ring before
he died before
his hands cooled started
to claw
but we couldn't remove
that symbol
of Elinor
of two years
three months
twenty-three days
left
without her
after
sixty-five years
one month
three days
married to her
the ring
of her
even in days of delirium
haze confusion
his ring not
sixty-seven years old
but twenty
her gift a remedy
for missing some thing
of his
to cling to during his three weeks
in the hospital
his chest cracked open
widow-maker averted
somehow

Wilderness House Literary Review 17/1

She inscribed his ring
 ALL MY LOVE "ME"
the way she signed cards to him
birthday anniversary Christmas
 St. Patrick's Day
 valentines
the words against his left
 ring finger believed
to lead most directly to the heart
 which finally failed
 after ninety-six years
 five months
 nineteen days
as hers had
 after eighty-seven years
 six days

While I go to the sink
to fetch soap to ease
the ring off his finger
my sister works
it over his reluctant knuckle

I carry it home
to my daughter
Elinor's and Leo's rings
 unite
on their granddaughter's finger

Wilderness House Literary Review 17/1

Sprague Suite

after *Transition: Decade of Decision, Sprague Electric*>>MASS MoCA,
1989-1999 by Christopher Gillooly

I.

The Mark of Reliability
scrapes windshield ice
after third shift

II.

Don't get injured
between noon and 12:30
when Nurse is at lunch.
She is more compassionate
than Industrial Relations.

III.

Sprague capacitors are proudly displayed
beside pencil points and dimes
to showcase their mid-twentieth century
intricate smallness.

All seem quaint today,
with our smartphones running
on far tinier components,
pens or mechanical pencils
if we write by hand at all,
plastic cards or electronic debits
rather than fumbled
pennies, nickels,
thin dimes.

Wilderness House Literary Review 17/1

IV.

On that last day in 1986

the clock stopped

at 5 o'clock

and twenty-one seconds

no quantity of capacitors

could restart it

disconnected wires

form its tail

V.

Industrial Buddha

When the jig was up

for Sprague's, Thursday night bowling

league ended, leaving

four red Zodiac candlepin

balls trapped in a locker.

VI.

The tumbling Hoosic

smooths errant red and gray bricks

into downstream hearts

Wilderness House Literary Review 17/1

In my purse

cheap pens I won't miss if they're lost
my wallet, heavy with too many coins
ibuprofen for headaches
a pack of tissues
hair ties for windy days
a dog-eared calendar
my license to drive
a crumpled shopping list
emergency cough drops
a pyx
my favorite mechanical pencil, extra lead
credit cards - insurance cards - loyalty cards
a laminated prayer card from my mother's funeral

Wilderness House Literary Review 17/1

Zoom Wedding - October 4, 2020

He fills a teacup with champagne, brings it to her lips.

It should have been a crystal flute
engraved with their names and June 6, 2020
but at least it isn't a red plastic Solo cup.

Their guests are arrayed in seven rows
of rectangles, their microphones muted
so they can hear the toast from the remote
best man, wearing his best
suit. No one wants to wear
clothes that aren't theirs.

She holds a teacup of champagne, brings it to his lips.

At least, the teacups match,
a long-ago June wedding
gift to her great-grandparents,
blushing with pink roses, twining
thorned stems. The champagne is dry,
but the effervescence tickles his tongue.

His mother-in-law's voice brings him back
to the screen. "It's not the wedding.
It's the marriage that's important."
In her top-tier rectangle, her eyes
fill with tears as his father-in-law drapes
an arm around her shoulder.

He does the same, as they take another sip of champagne,
each from their own teacup.

opening line taken from "Aubade with Burning City" by Ocean Vuong

Wilderness House Literary Review 17/1

Monroe Bridge Mail

Connie's Market was written in script
below the front windows
but everyone called it Bozo's,
the preferred nickname of the proprietor
Cornelius, not to be confused
with the clown who appeared
on our black-and-white TVs
who "always laughs, never frowns."
Although folks didn't buy much there,
Mrs. Snow would get us treats
on Friday afternoons before driving us home
from school - sasparillas or Yoo-hoos from the cooler
or a nickel's worth of penny candy,
Atomic Fireballs, Pixy Stix, SweetTarts -
but someone from every house
down in the Bridge came in
Monday through Saturday to get the mail,
everyone who lived in the valley
in the part of Rowe on the west side
of the Deerfield that became the town of Monroe
and the Rowe postmaster would say to leave
the mail at the Monroe Bridge and the name
stuck, although the folks on the Hill
still got RFD from Readsboro
across the state line. Bozo
would move from the store counter
past the penny-candy case
to the post office, wooden boxes
with glass fronts so that he had to pull
out the mail to hand to you.
Our box 56 always had something
in it - Look or Life,
National Geographic or U.S. News & World Report,

Wilderness House Literary Review 17/1

which once featured my father in an article
because we lived closer to a nuclear
power plant than anyone else in the United States,
cards or letters addressed in elegant cursive,
Ward's or Sears' or Penney's catalogs
to order clothes and toys and all the other
things Bozo didn't sell -
Box 56 although there weren't enough houses
in town to take up 1 through 55,
but you could just write a name
and "Monroe Bridge 01350"
and Bozo would give it to you
because he knew your box number,
even if the sender didn't.

I was away at school
when Bozo retired and the store closed,
the post office open with Mom's friend Olga
as postmistress, when the Postal Service
renovated and brought in previously used
metal boxes that were all numbered in the four hundreds
so my parents' box was technically
now 456 but you still wrote 56
on the envelope and Olga took care
of it, but you couldn't see into your box
anymore and by Postal Regulation
needed to use your little key
and take your mail out yourself,
something that the older folks in town
never got the hang of, insisting
that Olga hand them their mail
as she and Bozo always had.
My mom would walk down and stay
to keep Olga company as there were fewer
and fewer people still in town

Wilderness House Literary Review 17/1

and the Postal Authorities threatened closure,
and Olga called junk mail
bread and butter because it kept the post office alive,
and I did my part by mail-ordering
all my stamps from her
from two hundred miles away,
but eventually Olga retired,
the post office closed,
replaced by a small constellation
of boxes outside the town office
in the used-to-be school,
and, Monday through Saturday,
someone crosses the Monroe Bridge,
spends a few minutes stuffing envelopes
into locked boxes, retrieves outgoing
mail from the blue box, and drives away.