

Wilderness House Literary Review 3/4

Julia Carlson

South Dakota Red

In South Dakota near this highway # I-9
An old Comanche I met at Wall Drug
We struck up a conversation
He pointed out across the parking lot said
This used to be a meadow
Home to the Buffalo
Men on the high plain
High in their saddles
Firing
Killed most all of 'em
[Leaning in close said
Walls' sells buffalo burgers
At their diner here
And they're mighty good]
Those high plains men -
Rude, snarling like angry dogs
What's the matter with you
This ain't no hotel
Straw, dusty men with dirty faces
Even dumb men need to eat
Anything for a dinner or a meal
Steal a horse and run away
Clean clothes and a slave
Or a woman
That's the cowboy western way
A mother dies a daughter asks
Is Mommy sleeping now?
And the old man finds his son drunk
Tells him You haven't spoken to God
Since your mother died
There used to be herds running
In thundering dusty waves.
Now. We got the casino
And the landfill and next
It's the nuclear plant and

Wilderness House Literary Review 3/4

They promised us
The nukes will not detonate on impact.

The Widower

He has built himself a prison of sorts
Bound by obligations and discipline
Where he keeps her memories
And worships his pain
Where every falling autumn leaf speaks
Of her and her red hair
Where every spring blossom recalls
Her velvet petaled skin
Where the hot summer wind warms him
Like her throaty voice against his chest
Why did he ever think to leave her?
It was his fault and the drink
What happened next -
The other woman was only that -
And now, as he rises early every day
For sleep comes late then flees
He sits at his meager table with his regret
Fills his glass and knows
He took her look of wanting as childishness
And gorged on his power over her
Failed to softly touch her neck
When she stood washing up at the sink
Apron strings tied round her supple waist
And turning to the drink
Tossed away her very loveliness
Cream skin and auburn hair
Draining his glass to its bitter end
Forgetting day-to-day to remember her
Pretending she did not belong to him
Imagining he would be better off free and alone
Alone only having to have her when he needed
And being free to take his need with someone else
Without a thought or backward glance at her
As she sat on the wooden barstool quietly shamed
If only he had stopped then, seen himself
In her pained and clear eyes

Wilderness House Literary Review 3/4

She did not miss a thing.
So: a car crash or cancer or heartache
An accidental fall followed by a coma
Death in childbirth a fall down the stairs
Run over in a parking lot sudden aneurism
Any of the ways women leave men for death
Now in all the winds and rains and stars
In all the fogs and snows
In all rustling leaves tart air
Bending blossoms and ripening fruits
In the unforgiving sun and speechless moon
He cannot find her
Not there not anywhere
Anymore
She has hidden deep within his guilt
Has twisted her soul into his very roots
Twining around him not quite strangling
Just a pressured tug as in their love-making
When her auburn hair wrapped around his throat.
He sees a star fall in the sky
He lays her dress on the bed
He lays beside the dress
He lays her dress on his chest
He weeps he weeps he weeps
Then rises looking for his glass.