

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/4

Fred Tarr
Elsinore

Monday in March brought an assortment
of bogus TV weather reports: the alarmist
rhetoric of storm emergency,-
the viewer-ship relies on Tim Hendricks,

Weather Authority. "Who is" rang
in Jeopardy. Last night, I remember a dream;
in it, I called the station.
In broken sing song English

I protested," You expect me to vote for
Tim Hendricks, the Weather Authority?
I can tell you,"I said,"I just took
the citizenship test for the whole
damn country,so don't mess with me."

"I'm from the Middle East by way of Canada,
the land of tundra and permafrost,
and sky high, sky wide weather fronts
stretching from the Canadian football

league's Calgary Stampeders
to the French Province Ephiphanares;
fronts that stagnate and don't change
for days. Nothing changes there,
why here?" I asked.

"That's nice," said the Customer Service
person."I'll let Tim Hendricks,the Weather
Authority know you called. Have you been
in our viewing area long?"

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then I awoke to a knock
at the door when
actually eggs were
fluffed and done daydreaming.
Perhaps they would eat themselves.
the knock came, like a kid's knock

the first in several months,
it was spring and out early,
I noticed crocuses puny
with the first false warmth
of errant sunlight
cast over a March lull.

It was the first thing again,
well, almost the first thing
I noticed when I pulled the vestibule
door, reached the leveraged
storm, already open

and framing Elsinore, who
at sixteen and maturing quickly
didn't want to hear," well, hello,
what can I do for you today?" She turned
toward the street & back,
then to the street; craning her neck,

she practiced intrigue,
drawing me near: if Mom only knew
written in her eyes. I should have
pushed her out but I didn't.
I don't think I've
ever done that,
pushed someone out,-

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Elsinore, who had a history of people
talking down to her; Kelli, her cleavage
Mom, walked her yard and the house.
She held her head aloft,
smiled to herself, like a over-sized
napkin mannequin aflame
the Maisonette's evening tables.

Rosetta, her Mom's mom living with.
Bobby, the grave digger
who parked his muddy boots on the tarmac,
left his shovel upright
by the yawning chasm of garage,-

All winter the only human color
came from them next door:
the patriotic riot of ripped and pulverized
Budweiser cartons spilled
into a chicken noodle snow.

I opened the storm a little wider
to infer a colder wind at her back.
no shelter here, I thought,
I didn't want to step

on a sidewalk crack and break my back.
she said she hadn't seen me
all winter and I said
I don't have any sugar and I

don't have a clean cup to put it in.
can you hear me now, I felt like saying,
can you hear me now.
She laughed and said she hadn't come

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for that. Said I just wanted to show
you something, I wanted to show
you Me she said as she bombed
the door sill with her leather toe,-

the storm sprung partly shut at the top,
distracted by her shoe,"cuse me'
she said as she pulled her shirt tail out.
Several buttons slipped away
from their moorings

& launched cotton candy ships
under a primrose sky.
She finger-ran the under-rim, snapped
once, twice: her bra opened
like magic in front and she
talked about all the Opportunity

available in the world ; her mother
lectured her about finding
opportunity and that it was right in
front of you most of the time, she laughed
nervously,-- "so anyway,
that's my name, Opportunity," she said
"I doubt I could please my Mother anyway."
Her face lay down in a sexual plateau.

you'd better go home, I rehearsed,
does your mother know you're here,
put your shirt back on young lady
you need to leave now,
Els, you need to leave now
seemed an echo of chorused noise,

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a nightmare of joy and
fear clouded the living room,
spun a crowned carnival field, tilted it west,
lofted a circus crowd, brought a scare crow
farm boy front and center. He hung a wooden
mallet two times his lean arm, swung
& pounded the leather stump, flew

a brazen steel mullet
up the numbered scale,
the buzzard climbed the arc
into an infinite
summer sky, pummeled my ear

with a sour bell note orgasm,
-a dry, shouted victory
in an otherwise cool summer night.
I looked at Elsinore.

This morning in the foyer,
there were no winners,
the eggs were off the burner,
the house strangely still.
she began setting boundaries
in frozen tundra,
snowy parameters, saying if you
want me to leave, say so now,
or else don't say anything
it being the same thing,

saying Confrontation has a life of its own
so play it out, play it all the way out,--
one or the other, polarized,
stigmatized, shut down; her reactions

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the same,- tipping and splaying her breasts
with her opaque press-on adult finger nails
looking all the while like an executioner,
an inquisitor,-Nothing of what

I was thinking, come back
when you're eighteen, come back
when you're dead. Check Bobby
for a new shovel, because you
just dug your own grave
seemed to come out my mouth.

I found an anniversary edition
of Life nearby and picked it up;
slick red ruffles and ruddy flourishes
gave me Hope, helped me recover.
"Have you seen this," I managed.
Her look said as much she hadn't come to
read Life magazine,I held it up like a magic

book, the title 'Life' seemed to
write the steamy door glass, movie style

" Except for this happening today, Els
you could be in Life, you could be
a part of Life,

have you looked through Life?
Have you lived long enough
to see any Life?"Her hands
dropped by her side,

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her eyes focused.
She was either going to rip
it out of my hands with her
Tonka Toy wrists,--
my words like Life itself
penetrated, she was transfixed.

“This just came in yesterday,
I know the people who write for Life
and they have been in homes
like yours, like mine,
to see what goes on behind closed doors,
They come to expose the undercroft,
the underbelly of privacy
we hold as a truth self-evident.”

One of her buttons adroitly fastened
under her adult nails of supreme mystery,
“You could be in here, we don’t know
who the reporters are

in Life, we don’t know when they
are coming, Kelli doesn’t know,--
look here In the forward written
in small print, under Life’s photos,
the people who take
these photos have their names
under the pictures in case
there are any complaints from readers,
had you thought about that?”
She focused. another button came loose,
another buttoned, loose and another.

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"We don't live in a free country."
I thought about saying,—" ripping your
pink panties off and fucking you won't
stop the black helicopters
from coming over our houses

and looking into our homes," but I didn't
say it. "I know that," she read my mind.
"I'm not free in my own house," she said,
"Bobby keeps drinking at the
kitchen table and staring me,
he's always staring me

in the bathroom when I come out.

Mom just laughs.

I curl my hair in the basement
because he's around my door."

"Well," I said, "Bobby's going to be

in the next issue.

it will be under victory or tragedy,
which of those titles do you think?"

Her hand laced another button
ladder, and her waist emptied
to find her pristine starched shirt-tail,
" you never know," I let out a long breath

"You never know what part
of our lives in our homes
will find it's way into Life," I said
exasperatedly. "You know, you're right
about that," she said, " I'm glad

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we talked about this," She was annoyed.
I'll see you later, bye," She said, smiling
off-offhandedly, as her leather sole reverted
to escape, banged the storm threshold,

gained leverage, relieved the sprung top
until her hand could find the closing piston,
then she was gone, leaving me holding Life
In my hand, the storm door closed after her.

Elsinore, what will become of her,
I wondered, as I went back to cold eggs,
& hard toast, feeling so much older
than I had ever been, my first visitor
of the new year, already 74 days into Life.
The freshness of her skin, her perfume
lingered a make-shift warming fireplace.

Soon it will be late Spring.
On Sunday, the Choc-Ful-O-Nuts kids
will come and throw gonzo ad papers
by the door and smile their faint
embarrassed penny-a-paper smile.
They will always look up;
they will always look down.
They will shake their heads.

In morning's pale resolution,
the door glass ripped shot sunlight
like thrown wedding rice;
broken pieces of Memory lanced
the blue couch, flayed the carpet.
Somewhere in the room,

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just beyond the range of light,
my Mother's ghost spoke, "Well done,
thou good and faithful servant,"
the words of Jesus echoed a soft locale.
"But Mom," I said exasperatedly,

"what about my boa
constrictor hard-on?"
"I'm glad of that, too" she said.
"Who was that?" Ruwe, my cat said
with her eyes. "Shut up and eat, Ruwe."

Soon, I could look forward to Anne across
the street standing by her driveway,
arms on hips, -looking my way,
her mind on fire under a head of hair,

she says the galaxy, as we know it,
is calcified: that the light you see
hardened and changed is..."well,"
she fumbles for description,
"the light is pale, dirty from the sinful
deeds of thousands."

What Bonwit won't tell, I'll offer,
that Johnny Walker Red has lost his head,
won't come tonight to clatter down her
steps; that some of the beauty in starlight
tonight is from the Self.