

Wilderness House Literary Review 19/1

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THERESA WIPED THE SWEAT FROM HER FOREHEAD with her sleeve and cast her fly toward the river. She felt her wrist bending as she made her cast, a move forbidden by her casting guide, Stella Sutton. Stella was an award-winning fly-casting instructor, not to mention a fly-fishing champion. Theresa knew her mistake before the fly hit the water and gave a deep sigh. "What's wrong with me?"

"Wrap this band around your wrist and the rod together so you won't be tempted to bend your wrist," said Stella, handing her a white silicone wristband. It looked like a LiveStrong bracelet, but without any words stamped into it. "That's yours to keep. Secure your wrist to the rod until you forget your wrist can even bend."

Stella took the rod from Theresa and handed her a red one. "Let's try another rod. Pay attention to how it feels, and I'll watch your motion again. We'll find you the right one. Stop the rod with determination on the back stop and the forward stop. Relax in the middle."

Theresa took a deep breath and began the back-and-forth motions. She liked to think of this as sky painting, or at least air painting, and the line was her bright orange paint. The summer sky was completely white; the clouds made the sun glow like an enormous lamp behind parchment paper, baking and pressing hot air downward as she watched her orange line.

"Yep, you're fast," said Stella. "You'll want a rod that bends at 12-15 inches. If it bends any further down, it will be harder for you to control, because those rods will be more responsive."

Theresa sighed, "I'm really working on slowing down."

Stella paused, then smiled and tilted her head. "That is pointless. You're a fast caster. That's your natural motion; your natural way. Don't work against it. Just find the right rod."

"It's not a bad thing?"

"It's not bad or good, it just is. You have to work with what is."

Theresa wiped away more sweat. The white parchment of sky was taut now, as if threatening to break. Maybe whatever suspended it was about to snap, or perhaps the paper itself would finally tear, releasing the sun's full fury against her.

"Let's move on," said Stella. "Rest assured; any fish right here have seen what we've got. Give it enough tries, but then keep moving."

"Be fast, but not so fast."

"Right. Fish are smart. Don't dawdle when you've thrown it a few times, and you know they've all seen this one. Either switch out your fly or move on to a new spot."

Theresa liked moving from location to location instead of standing around in the same one.

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"Now try this green rod," Stella said. "Strip the line this time, too."

With both hands engaged, and Stella's eyes watching, it was hard to pull the line out at the right pace, like when too much thought goes into one's steps on a stairway, causing a trip and fall. But this one felt right. "This is the best rod I've used today."

"I agree. You'll be ready for the colder fishing months."

Before long, the lesson was over.

Several years passed; moments rushing by like the earthy rivers she'd waded so cautiously.

One cold winter day, Theresa sat inside berating herself. This restlessness seemed to recur. "What horrible character I have," she thought, "When others are content doing the same things indefinitely."

Looking up from her laptop, she noticed something poking out from a messy pile of papers on the shelf. Finding artifacts in unusual places was common in her house, but she couldn't quite place this one. It was just a plain white wristband. When she slipped it onto her wrist, though, her hand suddenly grasped for a fly rod.

"It's not bad or good, it just is. You have to work with what is."

Quickly she pulled her green fly rod from the closet, assembled it and ran out into the yard. The sky was paper-white as she began to paint it with the orange line, watching the splashes of color loop back and forth. Suddenly the paper tore, pressing millions of white snowflakes furiously and beautifully downward.