

## Wilderness House Literary Review 21/2

*Edward Johnson*  
**SIMULATION**

It appears I have climbed  
into the attic of my life,  
diagonal screams of light  
frighten the dust.  
I scribble couplets  
on Ace Hardware receipts.  
My money guy  
is running scenarios:  
careening pick-up truck,  
abduction and ransom,  
cardiac infarction,  
Cascadian subduction.  
The goal, he says, is to die  
before you go broke.  
The windows up here are filthy,  
the world outside blurred.  
My sins are buried  
in decades of mud.  
I once rented a frog  
for a Kiwanis frog jump.  
I may invest whatever I have left  
in unexpected euphoria.

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**THE REMOVAL OF SKIN (in two sentences)**

The woman who curates  
exfoliating creams at Whole Foods  
suggested one day apropos of nothing  
as I rolled past with my cart  
of craft beer and toilet paper  
that the best of bad alternatives  
might be to be found dead  
in a hotel bathtub with no obvious  
signs of foul play as the world  
awaits autopsy results.

A couple of weeks later  
I saw her stocking organic Q-tips  
and counteroffered dying all at once  
while ice climbing or changing a tire  
so that loved ones can be quoted saying  
that you died doing what you loved  
to which she responded without pause  
while looking at my blueberries and kale,  
“we’re the only species  
that builds its own cages.”

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### NURSE

A public space sparsely peopled,  
a sugar maple, a box of Mercurys.  
It is sixty-eight degrees.  
A woman steps out for a vape,  
low-slung scrubs the color of toothpaste.  
It is pre-solstice, someplace past noon,  
the days have elasticized.  
Blood rushes through noodles of vein,  
a man howls, symptomatic.  
He lives out here. Thousands do,  
having fallen through the cabin floor  
into another America:  
the one of move it along,  
the one of nowhere else to go,  
the one of you brought this on yourself,  
the one of go back to where you came from.  
A bruise of sky looms to the West,  
her presence, fragile to begin with  
has begun to further fracture.  
She has a tattoo on her low back –  
Popeye about to slug a can of spinach,  
his one eye bulging toward the world.  
It may be time to break camp,  
head up toward the tree line.