

Wilderness House Literary Review 21/2

Paul Bavister

Loch Ness

For thirty years he slept in a van
next to the beach at the end of the loch.
When she drove past on her way to the boat
she sometimes spotted him splashing his face
or filming the sparkling waves.

She would park at the jetty
then take tourists out on the tour
and they were always surprised
at how wild it was and had no doubt
a long neck would rise from the loch.

The search for that monster paid her bills
but she had a secret to share
with the man who camped on the shore.
One evening she put a cardboard box
on the bonnet of her car

and showed the blotched photograph
of the monster lying dead on the beach
next to her granddad wearing a kilt.
There were close ups of its flippers,
its long neck, its needle teeth

in a grin that made his heart sink.
In the morning his van had gone.
The waiting crowd wobbled onto her boat
taking selfies with mock horror smiles
but when she pointed out

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the bubbles breaking through the waves
the giggling stopped
and as a shadow rose from the depths
they all shivered
and huddled up in their coats.

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Ridgeway

I walked the long, straight road
to the chalk track that led up
the hill between fields
of newly planted wheat.

From the ridge I looked back
and saw a figure in a black coat
merge with the shadows
beside a rusted grain store.

I walked down the slope
to a waterlogged wood.
Looking back up to the ridge,
I saw the man with his head down,

maybe checking a map.
Even as I excused him,
a thought crept up –
he looked like me

from two decades before.
Halfway up the next field,
I turned and saw him
by a clump of holly.

Every time I stopped,
he stopped. I called out,
but he didn't look up.
I wanted to grab him

by the collar of his tatty
black coat and say, *live*
to the very edge of what
you're capable of.

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So I turned back, hoping
to head him off,
but at every turn
the path was empty,
and before I knew it

I was on the long, straight road
back to where I started.

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Rare Metals

From within the planet's mineral flow,
a layer surfaced with laptop fragments
that soaked up the sun's heat
and fuelled an ant nest.

Egg chambers under keyboards
led in to the queen that pumped
pheromones to attentive workers
massed around the hard drive.

The ants took on elements as armour –
tungsten-hardened with stainless
nickel steel feelers sheened with yttrium
and gold niobium crystalline eyes.

Gallium blood jittered from
lithium-cobalt battery hearts.
Tantalum pincers were powdered
with copper greens.

Resins poured from phone cases
to form an amber plastic
that encased the struggles
of a polished steel ant.