



POETRY:
ALL FORMS & STYLES

DEER IN FOG AT TWILIGHT
NEAR SQUALICUM LAKE ROAD



RICHARD WIDERKEHR

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Image: [DEER IN THE FOREST \(II\)](#) by [Franz Marc \(1880-1916\)](#). Oil on canvas. 43.5 x 39.3 inches. 1914. [Public domain](#).

SYMPATHY FOR THE SCARECROW

What's wrong—why can't he free his arms,
call on beasts of mercy? As if he must appease
the gods of flame and so forth, he amps up
his adrenaline and dread, flails his spindly

limbs in the wind. The crows on topsoil
by the new starts know this isn't just work.
No one texts him, sends a video, reminds him
of the last time he walked on fire.

Shall we discuss his mute, charred eyes,
or leave that to the guardians of straw?
He gazes at the center of our blue spruce,

as if the trunk might see his ashen wrists,
fluent as wings once more as promised,
burning, of course, like dead bees.

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Snow flurries more sparse—my sister no longer
sleeps with the moon in her cardboard box.
As if to measure me, this brown-tailed deer
has paused in a grove of alders.

She flexes her haunches, ears flicking.
I have nothing to say to the dark, except
why question what light we're given—
the doe quiet as water.

SPIN THE BOTTLE: 1958

I remember the front closet in the dim foyer of Deena Mitzfeld's place in Forest Hills, which had no forest and few hills. The bottle we spun had pointed to my toes, her toes, her knees encased in white knee socks with a blue stripe. In the rummage sale of shadows in her closet, we kissed like minnows. The brush of her lips—no, it wasn't nothing, but what was it?

I can't recall the smell of her hair, whether our fingers touched. Almost as if our bodies were off in Bakersfield—her father's suit coats could have been zoot suits for all I knew, and her mom's frocks—did I even know the word *frock*? We said nothing, as if we were suppliants fated to enact this ritual of coats and shadows, tacit witnesses who, if they saw us, had the tact

to say nothing. As we two were fated never to say word one about our—well, it was *my* first kiss. I don't recall what floor of that brick monolith Deena's parents' apartment was on, only that the living room window looked out on a jungle gym in the tentative playground where next day I would hold out my arms, a paper airplane with no regrets, and fly.

AT O'HARE AIRPORT: HER FOXGLOVES

As I walk toward baggage check, my cell phone rings.
In an almost neutral tone, the male nurse
says, *The retest confirms it—your PSA has doubled.*
He suggests an appointment with oncology.
I sit on a steel bench. As passengers

glide toward terminals, I picture our mother's garden
where we sang, walk toward glass walls,
see I've forgotten my briefcase
and turn back. Amazing, still there. I get on
the moving walkway, find a taxi

driven by a young man from Ethiopia,
ask what his country is like. We ride
into the city, lights flashing, buildings floating.
He punches a number on his cell phone,
tilts the screen toward me.

I watch a video about caverns—
white rubble, stone burrows curving
in sunlight. *King Solomon went there,*
he tells me. *I'm Jewish,* I say.
Yisrael, he says, exactly

as we pronounce it in synagogue.
I imagine our mother's foxgloves—
spots of magenta, ink in crevices,
a black bee, upturned bells. The man's smile
goes back three thousand years.

ABOUT THE WRITER:

Richard Widerkehr's work has appeared in *Open: Journal of Arts & Letters* (O:JA&L), *Rattle*, *Writer's Almanac*, *Verses Daily*, and many others. He earned his M.A. at Columbia University and won two Hopwood first prizes for poetry at the University of Michigan. His third book of poems, *At the Grace Cafe*, has recently been published by Main Street Rag Press. He reads poems for *Shark Reef Review*.

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