

# eleven by eleven by five

*by* strannikov

## **where adolescents did roam**

the cigarette smoke could hardly have survived  
nor the ceiling in the corner on the floor,  
cheap cracked sheetrock still crumbles into white chalk,  
beer cans forty summers old sunk half-submerged  
in sand behind half-toppled cinder-block steps.  
the teens that guzzled and sipped those beers, all gone,  
lured into adulthood the way adults were  
(or killed along the way, the way children are),  
their own children long since lured into their age:  
teens now in sixth decades (of those that're left)  
fed trusted jukeboxes quarters by the score.

## **misery menagerie**

brief glances—otherwise, all eyes turned away  
(granted, glances not welcomed, that tell too much):  
all other eyes remain silent, perhaps mute.  
the perpendicular lives find room within  
to stand, to mill, to sip, and to sit, to eat,  
the tabletops full, parallel to the floor  
(the chairs all stationary, so they don't skid).  
chairs are not offered, they are there to be took,  
and habit forbids dining to those who stand—  
a stiff rebuke to vertical hungers all,  
no relief for constipation of the soul.

### **vanitas again, or confession from a vapor trail**

you're psychic, it is almost seven o'clock  
and yes, the hourglass will be turned on the dot  
(the hourglass has not gone digital, oh no,  
but these days, silicon is in with the sand).  
we can be forgiven for thinking time flies  
when it is we ourselves who verily fly.  
relieved that gravity regulates our flight  
on our planet's rolling, bouncing spins through space,  
we dismiss frames of reference that prevail:  
our velocities reduce to vapors what  
gravity does not reduce to utter dust.

### **what tears do deserve**

the only good tears are never seen or heard:  
if seen, they'd only be misconstrued, right?  
if heard, someone would complain about the sound.  
alone in the dark is the only fit place—  
then, all the towels and the buckets you need!  
the towels can be hung out before day breaks,  
the buckets can be emptied where nothing grows  
(all that salt), after which, a day can begin:  
another day for tears to wait until night  
when they will not be seen and will not be heard—  
tears do deserve to be as private as blood.

### **what do tears deserve?**

do tears deserve to be as private as blood?  
opportunistic'ly, each fluid escapes  
when injury is reported by the nerves

(which makes nerves arbiters of human truth):  
any tears leaking from our lachrymose veins  
as valid as any eye weeping its blood.  
—but do observe: doctors never transfuse tears,  
no matter what injury the eyes report,  
as if eyes never dared suffer from a drought,  
as if blood transfusions alone address pain,  
as if donated blood soothes taut optic nerves.

