

Spring 2013 Literary Magazine

Connections



COLLEGE *of* SOUTHERN MARYLAND

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Spring 2013 Literary Magazine

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CELEBRATING
CELEBRATING
20 YEARS
20 YEARS

Of Bikes and Bullets

George L. White

It was at a time when boys still wore button down sweaters, and in a neighborhood where there was no shame in wearing trousers short enough to expose a young man's perfectly white socks; trousers worn in a fashion that kept them from getting tangled up in a bicycle's sprocket.

There was something about that particular morning, made crisp by an October chill that was completely exhilarating. The sun, patient through the night, was just now able to escape the darkness and began to glance back at me over the horizon. The house was quiet except for the clanking of breakfast dishes being loaded by my mother into the drainer. I made my way down the narrow hallway that led to the rear of the house, pushed through the screen door that creaked in recognition of its years.

An adventure is in the making. I can feel it. This is a solo journey, and the first of its kind. I launch from the deck of my back porch, where upon rescuing a third-hand bicycle from certain death, I set out, unauthorized, for places unknown. Climbing high atop its rusty, child-sized frame; my hope is that the bicycle, and this growing feeling of freedom might last, perhaps forever!

Riding east, negotiating the winding asphalt trail, I slip over the crest of a short hill as small flecks of sunlight flash like sparks through tiny openings in the trees. Acorns pop beneath the cold rubber tires. "Gunfire!" I think. Brisk air sends late October leaves skittering across the winding path. A dozen more acorns pop and skip from beneath the tires! Pop-Pop-Pop-Pop-Pop! "Must be machine guns," I think. Giving a nod to my intuition, I bend down low to reduce drag, and to avoid incoming rounds: "Speed is essential."

Ahead, a long darkly shaded tunnel falls below a highway bridge. “Ah, safety. But what if the enemy is waiting in ambush on the bridge above? How would I know?” I reason. “Need to peddle faster.” Dropping swiftly down the hill, passing beneath the bridge, gaining speed as I go, I shout in defiance at the unseen enemy and an echo is returned. “HEY-hey-hey-hey...” Hastening my way through the tunnel I glimpse a trusted light on the other side as it reveals the ascending hill. “Need to maintain speed,” I worry. Pressing down hard on the pedals while pulling up fiercely on the handlebars, the bicycle begins a rhythmic creaking in response to the strain. Then, the inevitable.

Pow! “Gunshot!” I deduce. But no. It’s the chain. As it flies apart, my already-unsteady bike goes crashing into the earth: throwing me and my adventure tumbling into a pile of rocks and dust. “Medic!” I think. “Mom,” I whimper...



The Wise Old Owl Lived in a Book, by Anna Readen

Overheard at a Coffee Shop

Judith Allen-Levanthal

“I’m not saying
I believe her;

but
I’m not saying
I don’t believe her.

Do you know
what I’m saying?”

“Totally.”

“I mean . . .
I’m just not sure
I believe her;

but then,
I’m not sure I don’t believe her either.

Does that make sense?”

“Absolutely.”

The World is a Poem

Jeremy D. Lambert

The world is a poem in motion
It can be heard within the sound of the ocean

The world is a poem that spins
It dances freely in each blow of the wind

The world is a poem that roars
It can be seen in the heart of a storm

The world is a poem filled with grace
It glows like a smile on a small child's face

The world is a poem that once young turned old
Its youth has withered away trapped within its soul

The world is a poem that sings of our lives
It captures each and every tick and tock of time that passes us by

The world is a poem sprinkled with few laughs and with many tears
It is the journal that keeps the journeys we take and choices we
make throughout our years

The world is a poem that shall never ever cease
Even when the thoughts in our minds and beats of our hearts
decrease

The world is a poem for me just as it's a poem for you
It will never forget who we are just as it will never forget the sun,
stars or the moon.



Pure Innocence, by April Ramey

facing the chesapeake

Randolph Bridgeman

wind through my front porch screen
is rummaging through fishing gear
whistling in the lips of empty beer bottles
turning the pages of books i'd had
best intentions of reading this summer
clouds are stacking up on the bay
the weatherman has said for weeks
that it's going to rain
but it doesn't
the fishing report says the croaker
are biting but they're not
i've fished this point all my life
baited my hook with the hopes
of something more
wet my line in the comings
and goings of an ordinary life
then waited for good things to happen
but they don't
change comes on slowly out here
past the end of county maintenance
life here is a two lane back road
one way in
one way out

Flood

Sean Breslin

The smell woke him, same as yesterday, sopping and close like a stagnant pond; he pushed his face into the pillow to block out its thickness. Up close, the cornflower pattern on his sheets blurred and receded, the flowers big and mocking, looking for sunlight that hadn't come for days.

Tommy rolled onto his back and picked up the clock radio, slammed two double-A batteries into the back. Still no news, just the same rotation of country songs swirling through the airwaves like flotsam. None of the local stations came in; they'd gone dark soon after the rains started and the winds sped over the inlet. He gave up, got up, tried the bathroom faucet. It sputtered, spat, gave up too.

He knew he had some time. Last phone call he got was his brother, yesterday, to tell him the boats wouldn't make it out to the island until Monday, just sit tight. But Monday was still two days away, and his small stash of food under the bed was nearly gone. Ten years since he and Kelly had taken the house over, and all that time it was never this bad. Storms would build, weather reporters would forecast destruction, and nature would deliver a drizzle. Worst case, it'd be the tree limbs falling onto the roof. He'd call his brothers and together they'd chop up the wood while their father replaced shingles, perched precariously upon a ladder high above his sons' protestations. The brothers would all work faster than the other before they took a few steps back, panting, looking at what they'd done and wondering which limb would be the next to go. Kelly would come out from the house to tease them about how long it was taking to clear her yard, her father-in-law joining in from the ladder with a line about his slow-moving ground crew. But they'd finish the work, and as his brothers left town and his father lost his grit, Tommy kept on by himself, kept the house standing.

He tugged a shirt over his head and stared out his bedroom window at everything gray and wet and now so very unfamiliar. The damage was both thorough and random: first floor was a swamp, the shed washed away along with every tool he owned, but a canoe on top of the wood pile remained unmoved. The house across the narrow road, now sagging under its soaking weight, had barely changed at all until this week, the week his world began to drag down into the Patuxent, toward the Chesapeake, toward the sea.

He went to the hall and looked down the stairs at the water lapping at the third step, sloppy and black. Off came his jeans, wrinkled with sleep, and he began descending the steps into the living room. There was no pause before plunging his bare foot into the pool that had collected in his home, proceeding down the steps and onto the first floor. The water ringed his thighs and licked at the bottom of his shorts, warm and briny like the brackish creeks and inlets that surrounded the house, now merged together. He kept expecting his feet to sink into a silty bottom, but instead they found only a carpet's tiny fibers worming between his toes. His eyes adjusted to the dim light, and he could barely make out his pale feet among the objects the water had moved as it came into the house: a hardcover book, an ashtray, a picture of his parents. He bent over to pick up these things, thanked God when he saw the glass in the picture had not broken. But the photograph itself was warped, his parents distorted images of their young selves, now ghosts. He turned, still looking at the picture, and beneath the water a pain shot into his shin as it collided with something hard, a wooden chair on its side. Tommy surged, lifted the chair out of the water and tossed it against the wall, where it let out a pathetic crack before splashing down next to the couch. He cursed, sloshed to the chair and put it on top of the couch, bobbing slightly like a raft with a desperate passenger.

The water made everything monotone, gray-brown sullyng white throw pillows, patches of moisture bleeding into the

wallboard, and the ongoing rain kept the house in an constant dusk. He moved through the living room and into the kitchen, to the wall clock. Nine-forty a.m. He went to the fridge, which he hadn't touched since before the storm when the newscasters warned of power outages. Damn sure it's all spoiled now, so much for keeping it cool, Tommy thought, and heaved open the door. Water spilled into the fridge instantly, pushing the lettuce and plastic containers of leftovers into the kitchen, bumping into Tommy's legs as they drifted past. He snatched a beer from the flowing stream of his food, gave the clock a brief thought, then opened the can anyway. Still cold.

When the water finally came to rest inside the fridge, it reached just below the top shelf, sparing a quart of milk, half a sandwich wrapped in paper, some plastic baggies filled with deli meats and cheese. He grabbed the sandwich, left the door open and pushed his way through the wasted food drifting through the kitchen, and ate hunched over the kitchen counter, exhausted. Only awake ten minutes, maybe twenty, and he already wanted to go back upstairs to bed. The seeing wore him down: everything he wanted to preserve was lifted, shoved, released, unfastened, disheveled, lost to the water that kept rising, reminding him that nothing, that no one, could stay.

He finished the sandwich, rinsed his hands in the filthy water lapping at his thighs, went into the downstairs bedroom. He had been using the small room as an office, but after his father died the room became a storage locker for all that was left behind. A dresser stood between the two windows on the south wall, unmoved since the day he and his brother had brought it in. The things he had carefully organized and labeled had been skewed and toppled by their own buoyancy. A box of Christmas ornaments had spilled over, and tiny angels and sleighs and shiny balls of nylon swam among the old mattresses, the high school year books and photo albums. He went into the closet for some dry cardboard.

Before she got sick, Kelly had wanted to help him go through the stuff, whittle down what he wanted and what he could let go, and he would joke that the place could burn and he wouldn't miss any of it. Well, maybe he'd grab his mother's rosary, he had said, and she brought the rosary upstairs to their bedroom in case he had to grab it in a panic before walls came crashing down, before smoke could fill his throat and heat could squeeze the moisture from his skin. But now the house was filling slowly and he was waiting, watching his life succumb a quarter-inch at a time. He could afford to wade, he could afford to turn over the memories floating past his knees. Without Kelly's help and with nowhere to be, he moved through the stillness to the salvage.

He found a dry cardboard box high on a shelf, his father's shirts neatly folded inside. They came out, and in went his father's Zippo, which the old man had kept long after he gave up cigars. In went a few family pictures for which Tommy had never found a place. In went a small shoebox of postcards and letters Kelly had written him while she was at college in Baltimore, and he stopped for a moment to read her words again, smiled at the plans she imagined for their life together, the dreams he was still trying to live in her honor.

In went his high school yearbook.

Soon his box was spilling out like the river over its banks, and Tommy heaved it into his arms, steadied against his chest, and made his way toward the stairs. His feet slid along the floor, careful not to take too large a step. He reached the bottom of the steps and leaned against the wall to rest. And, as he shifted his weight, the bottom flaps of cardboard gave way, and out slid his life into the water, the best pieces of his tiny curatorial collection splashing down around his legs. He dropped the box, flailed and scooped at the objects, all floating sinking spinning around in the murk. Kelly's letters all fluttered out and soaked up the water, blurred and bled, ink stains spreading the way her cancer had done; his box at once became flimsy and sopping and useless.

He held a tiny clutch of treasure, a leather belt, his own high school diploma, a family photo pressed close to the glass with water like tissue on a microscope slide.

Tommy leaned back against the wall, felt the wires and bolts and glue that held it together all give way at once, his limp fingers releasing the little bits they'd managed to grasp from the flood. Whatever spark he had burned out, and he slid down the wall to the floor, let the water ride up his scalp and wash over his exhaustion, wash over his fight against time that he tried to box up and take with him. His head went under and he exhaled, eyes open, watched the bubbles rise and burst with such satisfaction, the deep bellow of escaping air shuddering in his ears.

The water was cool, soothing, and though the salt and dirt burned his eyes he kept them open, stared at the wavy world above. His mind found a tiny memory: swimming with Kelly in the inlet, him underwater and sneaking up beneath her. Wrapping his arms around her legs and hearing her muffled gasp above the water. The feel of her skin scissor-kicking between his forearms before he released her..

He shot up, sucking up air in buckets as he shook the water from his head. His arms, cramped and leaden only moments before, found their strength again and grabbed hold of the railing. Tommy hoisted himself up the stairs and back to his room.

He dressed, found dry clothes, extra socks, a toothbrush, jammed them all into an old duffel bag from some local gym he'd joined long ago. The window screen popped out with a sharp, unrestrained kick, flew through the rain and spun into the slow-moving current below. He stuck his head out the window and looked down at the canoe atop the wood pile, propped up against the house a good two feet above the water, eight feet below his bedroom window, the end of a paddle peeking out beneath the gunwale. The rain kept on, steady and oppressive. He drew back from the window, emptied a black trash bag filled with clothes

onto his floor, and tossed it over his body, ripped a hole out for his head, looped the duffel over his left shoulder. One leg out the window, then his head, then his torso, and he lowered himself down toward the canoe, feet dangling above the logs and hands bleeding as they clung to the metal window frame. The raindrops made tiny plastic pops as they hit the trash bag around his body, and Tommy shook his head to throw the water from his eyes, and he let go.

Ave Night

Eileen Doherty

Night's a good time to work: quiet.
Around one I stop, check
the dogs, the locks, the lights.

My bedside lamp rouses
the mockingbird that waits
in a maple across the street.

Ten nights I've heard him, subdued
but steadfast, calling the female
he nests with every year.

Nine nights, I've slept while
he kept vigil for her alone.
By habit he recites his life list
like a prayer.

This dawn they greet each other,
whistling "Whew, whew."
This dawn I sing along.

She holds.

Sherbrooke Lea Carson

I walk the halls of the structure
to which he holds the deed.
Wood and mortar filled with possessions
though held, not owned by me.

He holds the keys, the title, the land,
the door in random company.
He holds my name, my wrists, my breasts;
the right to claim what once was free.

I walk the sands of the shoreline
to which no man holds the deed.
Earth and Ocean meeting the Heavens
Sacred union, both bound and free.

She holds the core, the Light, the Love,
the depth and breadth of me.
She holds my hope, my hands, my heart;
with open palms and bended knee.



Mountain Pasture, by William Readen

White Flats

Desiree Glass

White flats for her wedding day
One, two, three—just three weeks away
“Mom, should I leave the shoes here?”
“Yes, leave them here.”

Leave them here! Don’t put them on!
Leave them here! You’re too young!

Twenty years fly like seconds on the clock
Hello, goodbye. Tick-tock, tick-tock.
Mind travels back, first thoughts of you
Wondering then, Can it be? Is it true?

Lord, You know what I’m suspecting—
Is it so? Am I expecting?

Flat on my back, jelly slathering
Belly bulging for an ultra—smattering
There’s the sight, here’s the news
Time to buy some little girl shoes!

Thank You, God, for baby on the way!
Prayers for her health and an easy birth-day!

Belly bigger, baby growing
Poking fingers, tapping, toeing
At my bursting bladder, rapping at my rib cage
Time for little girl to take center stage

I’m ready to go, Mom! Ready to get out!
Ready to see what this world’s about!

One, two, three...
Eight, nine, ten
Count them once
Count again

This little piggy went to the market,
This little piggy stayed home

Flat on my back, her belly on my toes
One, two, three, and up she goes
Flying on my feet, fingers interlaced
Giggles and squeals in this happy space

God, may my girl always soar with You
And follow the plan You've called her to

School bus screeches to a sudden stop
Down the steps with a skip and a hop
Feet flying fast to my warm embrace
With a "Honey, how are you" and a kiss on the face

No matter where my daughter may roam
May You, Lord, lead her way back home

White sneakers climbing to the top of the build
Standing steady on shoulders of the skilled
One, two, three—bases push higher
There she goes, my daughter the flier

Dear God, keep her safe! Don't let her fall!
Please post your angels to heed her call!

Flat on my back, tears stream
Praying to God, silent screams
She's too young to become a wife!
I can't lose her from my life!

This little piggy, please stay home,
Safe in my arms, safe and warm!

I'm ready to go, Mom! Ready to get out!
Ready to see what this world's about!

“One, two, three
He's waiting for me
Seven, eight, nine
This man of mine

Time for me to fly.
Please, Mom, don't cry.

Time for little girl to take center aisle
He'll walk with us, Mom, mile by mile
He's heard your prayers and my prayers, too.
And when I'm gone He'll watch over you.

Now have you seen my white flats?”

That Minute: Jacksonville, North Carolina, 1965

Wayne Karlin

It was as if they had stepped out to a different planet where everything was familiar but somehow off. Like aliens had seen movies or sucked memories out of people's brains, and then had turned away and built from their impressions. As if they had *paraphrased* a town. Ridge wasn't sure why he saw everything that way. It was Sunday. A sunny Sunday. In front of him a wide, tree-lined, main street picketed with parking meters, a traffic light swaying overhead. A drug store (Rexall), a movie theatre (*The Ten Commandments*), a family restaurant (Randy's Roost). People inside perched on stools at the zinc counter or sitting in vinyl-cushioned booths. Like exhibits of themselves. To his eyes. The women in pastel Sunday dresses, beehive hairdos and make-up that froze their faces into lacquered masks; the men in white shirts and black jackets or in checkered shirts, jeans or overalls, long, narrow faces held between the parenthesis of sideburns.

Ridge clicked his vision outside the restaurant again, looking at the scene in increments, per training. The phrase: *If You Like Home Cooking, Stay the "H" Home* etched on the big street-side window of Randy's. Three steepled churches: two Baptist, one Methodist. A sign in front *God is Watching*. Three old men on a bench, staring at Ridge and his friends like God's spies. The traffic light hanging over the intersection turned green. A rust-red Buick, its rear window painted in swirls of dust, moved forward. A Chevy pickup, happy Lab setter in the back, pink tongue flecking foam into the breeze. Down the street what might be a town hall, red brick; he imagined a little square in front, pecan trees dapple-shading the statue of a Confederate General. A *prototype* of a Southern town, Ridge thought; would

that be the word? His friend Robby, who came from a town in South Carolina that was probably just like this one, thought of Ridge as a New York intellectual because he had some books in his footlocker. *A Stone for Danny Fisher, Lord of the Rings, The Agony and the Ecstasy. Webster's New World Dictionary.* Seeing the latter, Robby, six foot three, two hundred and fifty pounds, a G.E.D. dropout like Ridge, had insisted on a program to improve his vocabulary, help him *possess*, he said, his new experiences. It was something the other three in the fire team had gotten into, styling themselves educated warriors, memorizing two new words—chosen by Ridge—each day. *Misogynist. Anachronism.* Ridge's own store of words accumulating as a result.

Displacement. Alienation.

But no, he admitted, this was no strange planet. He was just in America. As opposed to being in the Marine Corps. Though he could see tendrils of the latter now, insinuated among the other buildings. A bar, (Gunnys Slop Chute), another, (Rosie's), two pawn shops. But subtract those and his imagined Confederate General and this could be Ridge's own hometown. The strangeness in his eyes, he understood, obtained from the disorganized, discombobulated *civilianness* of it all. Was that a word, Robby? The town existed because of the base it clung to like a lamprey. But it was on Earth. He and the other three with him now, were the ones from a different planet, aliens from the Planet of the Marines. Camp Geiger Tigers. His own vision had shifted. He saw things *symmetrically*. What was unsymmetrical put him off. People diddybopping down the street out of step, maintaining erratically different intervals, hair of many lengths, clothes of many colors, shoes of many scuffs, arms flying and flailing every which way, worse, hands thrust into pockets, fingers fingering and scratching, mouths gaping, yawning, smiling, smoking, joking, slumping, chewing, farting, spitting. Dissimilar or dysfunctional physiques. Overalls falling straight down, waist

to heels, pouched over an absence of ass or straining in front to hold in a bowling-ball of a belly, a woman swinging hips wide as a dumpster, hair piled multi-layered and multicolored atop her head like an ice cream sundae. It had all become strange to his eyes. He was a spectator, outside the bubble, he and Robby and Chris and Anton in their spotless class A uniforms, three knife-sharp creases on the backs of their shirts, two in the front, rifle badges centered exactly over their chest pockets, shoes spit-shined so fine that tiny suns flared from their tips, piss-cutter caps square on their heads, whitewall (or in Anton's case, he supposed, blackwall) haircuts. They were a single creature, fine-tuned, in-step, flat-bellied, wind-burned, taut-muscled. They finished each others' sentences or didn't have to, shared a vocabulary that wasn't in Webster's and a set of references that they had earned and now owned. Twelve weeks at Parris Island, D.I.'s spittle still on their faces, fist bruises still on their bellies, curses still ringing in their ears; four weeks at Lejeune, working together as a fire team, running four miles a day, twenty mile hikes, sixty-pound packs; field-stripping and cleaning and firing M-14 rifles and M-60 machine guns and M-1's and Browning Automatic Rifles left over from Korea at cardboard Viet Cong, throwing grenades, sneaking and peeping through thick woods and mucked swamps on nighttime compass navigations, sleeping in holes, jumping the space between two second-story windows in full gear, climbing ropes in same, crawling under barbed wire, rounds cracking over head, shot at and missed, shit at and hit. The four of them walking down this chaotic, disorganized street now, automatically in step, arms swinging six inches to the front, three to the rear, ChrisAntonRidgeRobby: Jersey boy, Marylander, New Yorker and red-neck, all knit into the same body, a life-form from another planet. They had each others' backs. They would die for each other. Brothers. Guardians of these soft, sloppy *mundane* civilians.

The word civilians in his head somehow brought up, *conjured*, of all things, the image of an English muffin. Himself back in White Plains, when he'd worked at the A&P all through junior and senior high, herding shopping carts from the parking lot. He and Nick Poppalardo paid to rove the area, search out the carts people would roll away into the parking lots and garages and alleys and hallways of the apartment buildings around the A&P and bring them back, sometimes after fistfights with kids—or adults—who felt *proprietary* over what they had taken so much trouble to bring so far away. Rewarding themselves after each mission, he and Nick, with English muffins at the zinc counter of Frenchie's Coffee Shop, the craters and crevices in the muffin brimming with melting butter. An English or an order of mashed potatoes and gravy, if he was really hungry, both less than fifty cents.

“What's the Southern word for English muffin,” he asked Robby.

“Cow turd,” Robby said.

“Roger English Muffin, man,” Chris said. “Get some.”

He opened the door to Randy's. Ridge thought he saw a flicker of doubt in Robby's eyes, a hesitation before he walked in; the hum of conversation, the laughter and tossed you-alls, dying down to whispers and then silence, as they strutted back to an empty booth. Where Ridge's ass naturally caught the section of the vinyl cushion patched with duck tape. He and Robby on one side of the table, Chris and Anton on the other. They each looked at the laminated menus, Randy's slogan on the top. Stay the “H” Home. Ridge mouthed the word “hell” and then said it aloud, like a prayer, as if to fill in the blank. But sitting with his friends now he was glad he hadn't stayed the hell home, saw himself pushing an endless line of shopping carts up an eternal slope, right into a sad middle age. He looked further down the menu, seeking the exotic, pondered the word *grits*. Wasn't there

a comic book, Sgt. Grit? Meaning stubbornly courageous. Or something, some dust speck you got in your eye. A *grit*. Could a grit be a grunt? Chris and Anton were flipping through the selections on the mini juke box fastened to the wall. *Soldier Boy*, *My Boyfriend's Back*, *It's in His Kiss*, *Mickey's Monkey*, *My Girl*, Motown co-existing with Hank Snow and Loretta Lynn. Robby was looking around nervously, as if assessing a new piece of terrain. It was the first time, Ridge realized, they were not eating together in a mess hall or opening C's out in the field. The first time they would have to order and pay for a meal since they put on the uniform.

The waitress was coming towards them. Blond hair piled up, with a curl falling over her forehead, bee-stung, strawberry lips, creamy skin, firm breasts under a red-checked shirt, and when she turned, tight jeans and a tight ass that he rose to like a pointer. What they were fighting for.

“Serendipitous,” Chris said.

“Aesthetic,” Anton said.

Robby looked away, fidgeted, reddened, drummed his fingers against the top of the sugar container, Ridge taking it for an attack of the shys, feeling a wave of affection for the big guy. He noticed that the noise level in the restaurant, which had risen slowly since they came in, had fallen again to whispers; some people nudging each other. He thought he understood, recognized the entertainment value of the scene: the G.I.'s and the local girl meeting cute. The waitress came over to their table. Nothing up close disappointed. She smiled at them warmly, her teeth perfect.

“Your teeth,” he said to her, “are perfect.”

Chris looked at him with dismay, mouthed: your teeth are perfect?

But her smile didn't fade. “I'm sorry, you all,” she said, and nodded at Anton. “We can't serve him in here.”

She gestured at a smaller sign, under *Stay the “H” Home*.

A sudden wisdom bloomed on Anton's face, as if he was remembering some vocabulary he should have never forgotten. He nodded at it, grinned tightly, got up. He left the restaurant. The other three stared after him.

"What will you all have," the waitress asked pleasantly.

They sat for a full minute, three white boys staring at the menus in the silence they were now part of. Chris slapped his menu down. "The fuck?" he asked. He rose. Ridge and Robby did also. They all knew it was too late. They left the restaurant, trying to follow their friend out into the America in whose name two of them would die during the next year. But he was gone.



Yia Yia's Pier, by Sophia Minshall

Death of a Carpenter

William Poe

The ideas from his head
Flowed like a flood
In a stream of crimson red consciousness
Coagulating on the sidewalk
In abstract outlines of pools of blood
Each poetic word
Appearing jumbled like alphabet soup
Senseless to the bystanders who heard the thud
With mouths agape as they tended the rooftop pigeon coops
He was the one bird
Not to be confined
Like some tenement building pigeon; caged, unrefined
He tried to soar like Icarus
And kept ascending toward the sun
Flew as high as the heat would let him
But his dreams were like a loaded gun
Pressing constantly to the back of his brain
With nowhere to go
But escape they did finally
On the busy sidewalk in front of a New York City
French style bistro

Dark and Stormy

Dee Sydnor

I sat at Sperry's that Saturday night, sipping on a Dark and Stormy. Old man Sperry brews the ginger beer for the drink himself and pairs it with some authentic black seal rum. The Dark and Stormy is how Block Island gets its nick-name as the Bermuda of New England, since we've kind of adopted the drink as our own. I inhaled deeply the ginger from the drink, thinking ginger snaps and gingerbread houses from childhood. Sperry's is an old fashioned looking pub. Reminds me of Cheers, you know, where everybody knows your name. A thick chunk of oak forms the bar. A thick, clear coating covers a swag knotted rope pattern that's carved into the wood, keeping it all smooth on the elbows. Carved navigation flags form a crown molding around its walls, and shelves high on the walls hold sailing ships that somebody, probably Sperry, has put together. Cozy.

At the end of the bar that night sat a guitarist, playing for the crowd. He hadn't been in here before. I figured he must be new in town. I heard the strumming of the chords as he played, and I closed my eyes and just listened as I got a buzz on the ginger scent, or maybe it was the rum. No words, just music. The song became familiar, "Sister Golden Hair." I remembered it from the band, "America," back when I was in high school. I began to sing along to the strumming, two tables away from the musician, with my eyes seeing nothing and wistfully daydreaming of cookie cutters.

"And I just can't live without you, can't you see it in my eyes. I've been one poor correspondent and I've been too, too hard to find, but it doesn't mean you ain't been on my mind."

I finished singing the song to the guitar dude's strumming, and when he finished he took a break, and sat down next to me.

On cue, Charlie, the bartender showed up; “what will it be?”
“Jack and Coke for me, and give the lady another of whatever she’s drinking.”

“Jack and Coke, Dark and Stormy. Got it.”

“Dark and Stormy? Never heard of it. Just the drink, or is the lady in a dark and stormy mood?”

Damn it. Dimples. And a beard. “Never heard of it? I thought everybody had. Both, I guess.”

“You ought to sing with me more often. Sounds a lot better than just my picking and strumming.”

“Why don’t you sing?”

“Because I sing like a toad.”

“Hard for a toad to hold a guitar, hmm?” I smiled.

“Yes ma’am.”

“Where are you from? I haven’t seen you in here before.”

“Ma’am, if I’m not mistaken, that sounds like a pickup line.”

The heat rose from my neck upward, but I was saved by Charlie.

“Jack and Coke. Dark and Stormy.”

“You ought to have Stormy sing with you after the break,” Charlie said to my new friend, whose name I realized I didn’t know.

“Stormy?”

“Just like the drink, yeah. It’s really Stephanie. Yours?”

“Peregrin. Call me Grin.”

“OK, sounds like we’re a pair. Stormy and Grin. A weird pair...”

There was something about this guy, Grin. What kind of name was that, anyway? Maybe I wasn’t one to question. He seemed to have the greenest eyes, but they seemed to have a darkness in them. Mine were brown, and his just fascinated me. His eyes were green like a new leaf on an oak tree in the spring.

He had dark curly hair, looked like he'd been out in the wind and not combed it when he'd come inside.

"So, you're new in town. Where'd you come from? I don't think you answered that before."

"What makes you think I'm new in town?"

"Look, Grin, I know everybody here. And you never heard of a Dark and Stormy."

"Yeah, you're right. Just kidding around. I'm from western Pennsylvania. A little town called Penfield."

"What brings you to these parts?"

"Just looking to try something new. The wind was blowing eastward that day, so I drove east. Ended up in Newport, and landed this gig from some lady who hooked me up with Sperry."

"Time to get back up there," he said, killing the end of his drink. "Join me?"

"Sure. What the hell. Mine was still half full, but I downed it too. What am I singing?"

"Know Desperado?"

"Hell, I AM Desperado. Yeah, I know it."

The sunlight has a way of being just a little too bright some mornings, and I stretched and rested my arm across my eyes. The warm leg against mine reminded me that I wasn't alone. I rolled over, the glare of the sunrise off the water nearly blinding me. I found him looking at me, smiling.

"Sky's red, that's a good sign, right?"

"Mmm not in the morning." I rolled my eyes and turned over. He cuddled up behind me, put a hand on my shoulder. His fingers began to run through my hair, separating my curls so gently, sending prickly shivers down my front. I used to hate my curls when I was little. My dad didn't know much about taking care of a girl, and a girl with hair challenges was on her own.

Somewhere along the line, a teacher or a hairdresser taught me to embrace my curls and just put plenty of hair products in to manage them. It was hard growing up without a mom around, but somehow we made it through, just me and Dad.

“What does the lady do for a living?”

“Hmm? Nothing on a Sunday.”

“What about on a Monday?”

“I run the shop my dad had started when he was living.”

“Must be doing alright. Any other family around?”

“No, just me, by my lonesome. Look, I need to get some things done today. I’m supposed to meet some friends for lunch, and I’ve got things to catch up on before the weekend’s over.”

“Oh, right.” He rolled away from me, and I felt the chill of the air as he lifted the covers. “Yeah, I have things I’ve gotta get done today, too.” The bed creaked, and he rolled out. I heard the jingle of the belt in his Levi’s followed by the sound of the zipper. I turned toward him.

“So, I’ll see you again sometime?”

“Yeah, sometime.”

“Maybe I’ll sing another song with you down at Sperry’s next time you’re playing your guitar.”

“Yeah, maybe. Look, I’m just going to let myself out.”

I climbed out, made my bed, started the coffee pot, and turned on the shower to warm up. The towels in the cabinet toppled over as I pulled out the teal one at the top of the stack. I straightened them, closed the cabinet, and hung my towel over the rack by the shower. I pulled back the shower curtain, the sailboat printed in its center folding upon itself like a shipwreck. Stepping in, the water was warm, and I let it run on me and began to wash my hair. The shampoo smelled like coconuts,

and the smell helped to clear my mind. I rinsed my hair, leaning my head back so the water mist sprayed in my eyes as the water does when the boat heels in a stormy wind. My eyes remained closed while I rinsed, and as I opened them, I saw blackness. I turned the faucets off, pulled the curtain open, and felt for my towel on the rack. Another damned power outage.

I stepped out into my room where the daylight let me see to get dressed and put on my underclothes. I pulled on a black t-shirt, one of my Stormy's Sailing promo shirts, and a pair of Levi's, wondering what had caused the power outage. The sun was still shining out there, though some dark clouds seemed to be heading in my direction. I grabbed the phonebook in my nightstand and looked inside the front cover for the emergency outage number. 913-68NEPCO.

"If you'd like to report an outage, press or say one. *Si usted desea reportar un apagón, pulse o diga dos.*"

I pressed one.

"The number you are calling from is 913-684-2378. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"The system has your address as 1912 Oak Road. Is that correct?"

"Yes." I've always hated talking to a machine.

"Thank you for your patience. The outage has been reported. Good-bye." Click.

I walked out into the kitchen and saw that the coffee pot had brewed about a cup before electricity was lost. I grabbed a cup from the cabinet and emptied the pot into my mug. Sipping it, I retrieved my keys and purse from the rack by the backdoor. My 95 Plymouth was parked in the gravel by the back porch steps. I got it new three years ago with the money

Dad left me in his will. I put the key in the door to unlock it, and I got inside. I figured I'd run up to Misty's coffee shop to see if she knew what's going on with the power. I put the key in the ignition, pulled the buckle for my seatbelt across me and locked it. I released the emergency brake, placed my foot on the brake pedal, and turned the key in the ignition. Nothing.

"What the hell?" I tried it again. Still nothing. "What the hell is going on? Nothing's working. Some freaking shift in the universe?" I walked back into the kitchen, grabbed the boat key off the rack, let the screen door slam behind me and stormed down the steps of the porch. The path to the pier is a familiar one. "There's more than one way to skin a cat." I saw my kayak first, out in the middle of the river, apparently empty. "What?" My heart began to pound and I quickened my pace. This was getting too weird. I passed the shed that sits just before the steps that go down to the pier, and when I walked to the bottom of those steps, it was almost no surprise when my dinghy wasn't anywhere to be found. My heart was about to pound out of my chest, and my mind kept racing, trying to think of what I should do next. It's nearly a mile out my gravel drive to get to Mrs. Fitzwater's house. I decided I'd grab my bicycle or walk. I climbed the stairs, and I thought of Grin. I wondered if he could he have done this. Nobody likes rejection. What if he was still there? God, I couldn't even remember if his car was gone. It seemed like I would've noticed. Then I noticed that the shed door wasn't closed. Did I leave it open? No. There he was. Grin. And he was grinning.

"Hi! What are you doing here?"

"You didn't want me to leave so soon, did you? Really, we were just getting to know each other."

"No, of course not."

"Good. That's what I thought."

"Did you ... do you know what happened here?"

"What's the matter? Missing something? Don't you worry."

Everything's fine. I just wanted to make sure you stayed around a little while so we could talk."

"So I don't need to worry?"

"Of course not. Hey, I'm really hungry. You think you could fix me a sandwich or something?" He smiled then, knowing I wouldn't say no to him.

"Okay. I think I have some chicken salad and some bread. Is that okay?"

"Peachy."

He followed me inside then, and I complained that I couldn't see very well with the power out.

"Well, maybe you should be a little nicer to your guests, then."

"I'm sorry. Really, I didn't mean to be so rude."

"Yeah, that's easy to say now."

I took the chicken salad out of the fridge and wished I could've had foresight enough to poison it. I got the bread out of the pantry, and began to untwist the tie on the bread bag. I took a Corelle plate out of the cupboard, an old one with a green ivy pattern around the edge, and I set it on the counter. I took two slices of honey wheat bread out of the bag and put them on the plate, flipping one over so it mirrored the other slice. I opened the silverware drawer, and he jumped up.

"Let me get that. Don't want you to get any crazy ideas." He took a dinner knife out of the drawer and handed it to me. I began to spread the chicken salad on the bread, and I tried to act like nothing was peculiar, when really everything was peculiar and my brain was spinning with ways I could get myself out. I didn't know what he was capable of, but with all he had done, I knew I had to do something to get away from him.

"I made this chicken salad myself yesterday. I hope you like it." I carried it to the table, and he followed me and sat down. He picked up the sandwich, firmly holding the bread to keep the chicken inside. I heard what sounded like a car door outside.

“You expecting somebody?”

“No. Really, maybe a delivery or something?”

“On a Sunday.”

“I guess not. I really don’t know.” I heard a knock on the door.

“Get rid of them.”

I walked to the door. I saw the truck for the electric company through the window on the way. “It’s the electric company.”

“Okay, just tell them everything’s fine.”

I opened the door. “Hi. How can I help you?”

“We got a call that there was an outage here, but we can only trace it down to the house. Mind if we check the breaker panel? Sometimes the whole house breaker flips for whatever reason.”

“Oh? Well, that must be what happened. Let me show you.”

I slipped my body out the door, pulled it behind me, and walked to their truck, grabbing hold of the front of a worker’s jacket on the way, pulling him along with me.

“Lady?”

“I’ll explain.” The other worker followed along, not knowing what was going on, and Grin came to the door. I hoped he was unarmed, since he’d not pulled anything on me yet. “You need to get in the truck, and we need to get out of here. That man is crazy and I don’t know what he’ll do.”

The tall guy opened the door to the truck, and I got inside. The other worker got in beside me while the tall guy walked around to the driver’s seat.

Grin was running out the front door, “Honey, now don’t be bothering those gentlemen with our problems.”

“He your husband?” the tall guy asked me.

“No. It’s a long story. He’s crazy. Call the cops.”

learning from the leaves

Judy Angelheart

i like that one there
miss lucille clifton
on page 133
it falls out of my mouth
like honey
your words still taste
so sweet
i am a good woman
i too agree with the leaves



Lifeline, by Paul Toscano

Yard Sale

Wendy Kibler

“Will you take a quarter for this one? After all, it is cracked,” Katherine said to the blonde who stood next to an old card table, snapping her gum. On the table was a plastic tackle box, its compartments for lures replaced by dimes, nickels, quarters, and dollar bills. Apparently, there wasn’t a need for pennies and large bills at a yard sale.

The woman eyed the frame and answered, “It’s only a little crack; you could hide it with wood putty and stain.”

Surprising herself, Katherine persisted; she thought that’s what people did at yard sales: barter back and forth. It’s not like she even needed the frame. The walls were hung with photos of her children and grandchildren—and her wedding picture. It was the only photo of her and her husband together, and it hung crookedly from its picture hanger between two windows at the far corner of their bedroom.

Or what once was their bedroom. Now Katherine slept in the spare bedroom for a respite from her husband’s snoring. At first it was only for a week or so, Katherine promised him, but eventually she tucked her clothes into the empty bureau drawers and hung her housecoat on the back of the door.

Finally, the woman sighed, “Well, it is nine-thirty, and people usually stop coming around ten, so, okay, I’ll sell it to you for a quarter.”

Katherine, delighted with her first yard sale purchase, placed her quarter on the wobbly card table and walked away, dropping the remaining change in her pocket. Why she didn’t put it in her pocketbook, she didn’t know—perhaps, she felt she had earned it since she came with five dollars and spent a mere twenty-five cents for a frame she had bargained down from the original price on the curling yellow sticker.

After the yard sale, she was so pleased with herself that when she came home she shook her husband's shoulder as he slept in his chair by the television. When he had finished fishing he often came home to snack and doze off while John Wayne straddled his horse to take after the bad guys. Peanut shells slid down his belly as he snored. She shook him harder.

"I was sleeping. God, woman."

She held up her frame, arms straight out like a child showing off a kindergarten finger painting.

"I bought this for only a quarter at a yard sale; it was originally fifty cents, but I talked the seller down."

"It's cracked," he said, then picked up the remote and aimed it at the television set until he settled on a ballgame.

Her eyes filled with tears. How stupid. She knew better than to expect anything else. How stupid to get upset when there had been far more things she had gotten upset over. The new Bayliner boat he had purchased with some of his pension, the gym membership he never used, the arguments over the grandchildren coming to spend the night. And the nights shooting pool at the Watering Hole, a tiny bar, little more than a shack that sat precariously atop a sloping hill. How the drunken men navigated the steep driveway safely was beyond her.

At first Katherine went to yard sales because she was bored. Nearly every Saturday morning for forty years her husband woke up at five a.m. to fish until noon. When they were first married, she went along, but he thought her a distraction: she talked too much, moved around too much, got too cold, too hot. So she began bringing cheap romance novels to occupy herself, losing a pole in the bay once, she was so absorbed. He left her home after that. Fortunately, when the babies came she busied herself tending them. But her babies had long since grown and moved on to their own lives. And she could only do so much mopping and sweeping and dusting.

So she began to go to yard sales every Saturday, timing it between her husband leaving for fishing and returning from fishing. Sometimes she'd steal a dollar from his wallet, sometimes she'd write out checks to the grocery store, adding cash back of five dollars. Sometimes she'd fish under cushions in the car for various coins, which were plenty as she had become a shrewd bargainer.

One time, nearing 10 a.m., she mentioned to the sellers that surely they wouldn't want to haul off their stuff back into their attic and garage. Could they offer "Buy one, get one free?"

"That depends," the balding middle-aged man said. "What exactly do you want?"

She had been eying a tea kettle, still in its original box, and a dozen pieces of mismatched silverware. Actually, she had looked at them earlier, but discomfited by the prices, had driven to another yard sale in a different neighborhood. She had really liked the tea kettle, though, with its pink flowers on its yellow body. It would match the kitchen and they could always use more silverware. Besides, she could tuck the kettle behind the Tupperware in the cupboard. She was the only one who drank tea, and she drank it only in the morning with her bran muffin and grapefruit. She tired of boiling water in a saucepan, and didn't think the microwave turned out a very good tea. The silverware her husband probably wouldn't notice.

"I just love the tea kettle, and I could use extra silverware when my children and grandchildren come for Thanksgiving. Now we use plastic knives and forks." This she said a little too shrill. She was nervous at being so bold.

The man's wife came up and said, "She's right, Joe, let's not haul all that stuff back in. It'll probably end up at the dump anyway."

"Alright then. A dollar for both."

Katherine pulled a wrinkled bill from her coat pocket. The man straightened it, then placed it in the cash box—a used child’s pencil case.

“Enjoy,” said the woman, looking at her, smiling. “Would you like a bag?”

“Oh, yes, that would be wonderful,” she said thankfully, sliding her bargains into a plastic Wal-Mart bag.

She logged her purchases and prices in a small notebook, which she slid under clothing in her bureau drawer. She had learned to secret her purchases away in empty shoeboxes, underneath sweaters, under her bed.

She had the frame, of course, and tea kettle and silverware. She had a wooden lamp with a white pleated shade, various yards of fabric for curtains and quilts, a 5-piece set of Corning Ware dinner plates—the ones with the ivy winding its way around the perimeter—four drinking glasses, a hand mixer still in the box, a set of saucepans the owners swore were only used a few times.

She bought towels and comforters and placemats, and even some garden tools. When she exhausted the gadgets and linens and appliances, she began eyeing bookcases, folding chairs and a card table, twin bed frames and mattresses, and even the occasional sofa. But she had no place to store them.

When she realized her husband didn’t notice the larger grocery bills, she began writing out checks for ten and twenty dollars over. She stashed the money in her own plastic tackle box she had purchased at a yard sale for 90 cents. The box fit nicely in a large shoebox. She had removed the boots, and stood them in the back of her closet behind black pumps, mules and Keds.

The only other person that knew about her yard sale outings was her friend Carol. She was widowed a year ago and lived across town on an isolated street along a pond. Carol frequently

complained to Katherine that the house was too much to care for, but she just didn't have the energy to move.

One Saturday Katherine took her friend to a multi-neighborhood yard sale close to the town fire station.

"What do you think of this table? I think it's real cherry."

"Oh, I don't need another table, Katherine. You know that. It would only remind me of how empty the house is. Remember when the four of us would play cards at your kitchen table? Until . . . the cancer took him. I'm so lonely."

"I remember, dear. But, actually," Katherine said, "I meant for me."

"For you?"

"Well, no, I mean for my oldest. He barely has anything in that apartment." She laughed. "Of course, I don't need another table."

"I have plenty of room in the garage. Certainly you may keep it there for now."

After then Katherine went alone. That way she could move at her own pace, leave early enough to be home before her husband, and barter without Carol mentioning kindly that that wasn't the price on the sticker. It also gave her the privacy to tour open houses. She especially liked touring the homes that had already been vacated, as it allowed her to picture them with her own belongings in them. Although, truly, except for gifts she had received, nothing in the house she shared with her husband was hers. Her husband had never allowed her to work. A woman's place is in the home, he always said.

At first Carol appeared hurt that Katherine didn't include her, but then said she had found other things to do, but would be home in time for Katherine to drop off her newest purchases.

One Saturday she was surprised to see her husband's truck in the driveway when she returned.

"Where have you been?" her husband called out from the den.

“I just ran out for a little errand.”

“Well, make me lunch. I’ve been waiting since eleven.”

“No bites today?” she asked as she tucked the yards of lace and several romance novels under the seat cushion of the sofa in the front room.

“Just crappies.”

She brought a plate of sandwiches and chips back to him, and noticed the pair of sneakers she had bought him for his birthday, but he had never worn, by his chair.

“I see you’re wearing those sneakers.”

“Yeah. I figured I’d take a walk since I didn’t catch nothing.”

Soon it was September, and she knew the weather would turn soon and there weren’t going to be many more yard sales. She had already moved a rocker, TV stand, and futon to Carol’s. Then she moved on to the small appliances, linens, knick knacks, other things she had stowed away. Eventually, she took over some of her clothing, books, photo albums of the children, as well as things she brought to the marriage, such as crystal, gifts she had received for Mother’s Day, and the few pieces of jewelry her husband had given her when they were first married. Thankfully, Carol had a two-car garage. Katherine promised she would soon give everything to her children.

Carol had mentioned several times that she should stop in at a flea market. They were usually open year round. Katherine began thinking it was a good idea after all. She went on the last Saturday in October. At the market it was if the entire town had set up booths, booths that practically touched each other, where not only yard sale items were sold, but collectibles, antiques, hot dogs, limp fries, warm sodas, and raffle tickets for complete dining room sets. (She bought one of these.) But in the end, it was too overwhelming.

When she turned in to her neighborhood, she saw a poster board sign she hadn't seen when she left. "Moving Sale. South Essex Drive."

"I wonder who's having that?" she thought. The neighborhood newsletter usually advertised yard sales in advance. And on her own street, no less. No matter, she didn't need anything.

Cars lined the curbs of her street, some nearly on the sidewalk. She wasn't sure if there'd be parking near her own house. So she parked several houses away and walked.

She followed a group of people, their purses and wallets probably filled with coins and small bills. She followed them to her own small front yard, and spied the moving sale sign propped up against the bureau from the spare bedroom. Other furniture from the house littered the lawn: the kitchen table and chairs, the single bed she slept in, the bedroom suite she had once shared with her husband. And spread on a blanket, she saw the yard sale purchases she had secreted away: linens, appliances, tools, and the frame. Her husband stood at the top of their driveway, his arm around Carol, who smiled as she handed change to a customer.



Precision, by Sean Frost

The Turquoise Shirt

Lydia Kivrak

The mist was almost oppressive, spiraling around the dark trees like silver paint suspended in water. I shivered; it was damp and I was dressed for summer in gray shorts and a bright turquoise t-shirt.

With this realization came a flash of memory—an image: these same woods, but the trees were covered with green leaves and the sunlight was making spotlights on the ground. It should be July.

I had no right to be scared (why should I be scared—after all, there was nothing there but mist; no animals of any kind in sight) but I couldn't shake off the feeling that there was something lurking among the twisted black roots of the trees. Perhaps it was the uneasy feeling that a forest should always have living things in it, bugs crawling around or crows cawing. However, this place had neither, and the silence was even more frightening than any roar of beast.

Why was I here? Why was I wearing summer clothes when it looked and felt like November? And most importantly, who was I?

The feeling that something horrible was coming pressed down on my chest when a branch behind me cracked. It's ok, I thought as I jumped in surprise, It's probably just a rabbit or something. However, I started walking at a brisk pace in the opposite direction from whatever it was. I got the feeling this was no ordinary place, and it had been suspiciously deserted of all life and sound up to now. I would expect any rabbit around here to be a rabid killer rabbit with needle-like teeth.

I walked quickly through the twisted, gnarled trees, feeling as if one of them would fall on me any second. The spine-chilling silence did nothing to make me feel better. Tree roots sprawled

everywhere and I couldn't see well enough to avoid stumbling on them, what with the viscous gray fog.

Suddenly I heard another snap behind me, this one louder. This time, I could actually sense that there was something behind me, something big and dangerous. And it was coming specifically for me.

I started running then, desperate to get out of that hideous forest, though I didn't really know if there was a place that wasn't misty woods. I ran anywhere, tripping over nearly every root, and then picking myself up so quickly that it was as if I had not fallen at all. It was almost as if I flew over the roots, my hands not stopping me but vaulting my still-running feet over them. My hands and knees were soon scraped all over and bleeding. The red of the blood was a stark blur against all the gray and black and the blue of my shirt.

I could hear it behind me; it had stopped discretely stalking me, and was now running, breaking twigs and branches all around—they sounded brittle as glass. I turned my head briefly to try and see it, but I saw nothing but trees and vapor.

It was harder to run now, my breaths coming in gasps and pants, the branches trying to obstruct my path, whipping my face and torso, though they seemed to break easily for the thing behind me. I had no sense of time; I could have been running for hours and not noticed. The thing behind me did not tire, but it didn't catch up with me either. After a time I realized that it was playing with me, trying to wear me out for its own enjoyment. I kept on running in the wild hope that I would suddenly find myself at my home, but where that home was, I had no idea.

I didn't even have time to wonder anymore, as all my energy was focused on just putting one foot in front of the other, even as my legs ached and my hands stained the turquoise of my shirt a motley purple color when I tried to wipe the blood off them. The shirt was getting the worst of it, all ripped and bloodstained because of the branches and falls.

The crashing and thumping behind me grew louder and closer. It was closing in on me, apparently tired of its “game.”

Just as I felt my legs would give out, I pushed back a branch, and a grey road was suddenly in front of me; no banks or ditches or telephone poles near it, but a road nonetheless. I had stumbled onto it before I had even noticed its existence and was now looking back at the terrible misty forest, fearing the creature but somehow knowing that I was safe on the road.

The crashing stopped as I saw a pair of shining red eyes staring into mine. The fog fanned out from the monster, as if a drop of clear water had fallen in the paint, diluting it.

It was not a rabbit. The gruesome creature in front of me was a deer, but this deer was no cute forest animal. This deer was the most horrifying thing I had ever seen. Its eyes glowed red, and its antlers were white and sharpened; that wasn't the worst of it though. The left side of the deer was nearly ripped off, and its entrails were gaping out of its stomach, one of the intestines drawing a bloody line on the ground. I could hardly believe it was even alive, much less able to run after me.

The deer glared at me, but didn't move forward. I stared back at it, incredibly relieved that my intuition (if it was my intuition) was correct in thinking that I was safe on the road. I realized that I must have looked almost as horrifying as the deer, with my body scraped and my blue shirt torn; both bloody.

After a few tense minutes (or it could have been longer, as the mist seemed to make time stretch out) the deer turned and walked alongside the road, never on it. Out of curiosity, I followed. I didn't want to lose sight of it, and it seemed to be telling me something.

After taking a few steps I nearly walked into a car, which the mist had previously hidden from me. It was red and rusty and had a crushed hood and completely obliterated windshield.

Blood spattered its entire front, as if it had crashed into some sort of animal. A dark form was slumped over the steering wheel.

I quickly ran to the side as the deer watched me impassively “Are you okay in there?” I yelled futilely. Peering through the window, I could see the driver clearly. My heart stopped, and I could feel the deer’s eyes boring into the back of my head.

The driver wore a turquoise blue shirt.

In the times after

Patrick Allen

They did not speak of the time before,
A private thing between them.
They both knew it happened,
And could not be changed.
So they walked together,
Talked about this year's crop,
How the wheat kernels were particularly heavy,
How the weather had been especially mild.
They noted what a scamp that Cain was,
How he was jealous of Abel, the quieter, more thoughtful child.
"I fear he will become a wanderer on the earth," He once said
without humor.
He suppressed a smile when His creation said,
"I think the sun must move through the sky in a great circle
as it rises in the East and travels to the West,
yet comes again from the East at the next day's dawning."
Day by day,
Side by side, they walked and talked
About anything except what they both knew
Had become their unspoken of past.
What exquisite love existed between them
That they could rejoice in the unfolding elegy of creation?
What inchoate wonder allowed him to look upon Splendor,
Lamenting what was lost,
But still able to walk in Its presence?
What Awful Unforgetting Mind
Would come racing across time toward that ephemeral dust
For every two tottering steps it took toward Him?

Cats Are Bird Murderers

Benjamin Sloan

The room's wallpaper is a panorama of birds colorfully rendered either perched on branches or in various stages of flight. Also there are holes in the walls, some near the floor, others midway up, and several near the ceiling. In these holes are the faces of live cats staring hungrily at the two-dimensional birds. Suddenly one leaps out forcing you to run across the room and catch it in order to put it back. In fact you chase one cat after another all night long so that when you wake up in the morning you are thoroughly exhausted.

Contributor Notes

JUDITH ALLEN-LEVENTHAL teaches at the College of Southern Maryland.

PATRICK L. ALLEN is the chair for the Social Sciences and Public Services Division at CSM. He tries to look at natural events to see what lessons may be revealed through examination.

JUDY ANGELHEART is a poetess, a good woman, and a believer in the trees. She resides in Calvert County with her husband, Dimitrios, two dogs, and a cat. She enjoys riding her bike and sitting on the beach with something wonderful to drink, a book to read, and paper near at hand. When the weather is bitter and cold you will find her inside with the heat turned up, cooking something yummy, and sustaining.

SEAN BRESLIN has published nonfiction essays in *Metropolis*, a Philadelphia-based online magazine, and is a member of the Rittenhouse Writers Group. He lives and works in New Jersey, where he also plays guitar and mandolin for folk-rock trio The Umlauts.

RANDOLPH BRIDGEMAN grew up in the Pacific North West and settled in Southern Maryland after a 26-year military career. He graduated from St. Mary's College of Maryland and is the recipient of the Edward T. Lewis Poetry Prize. His poems have been published in numerous poetry reviews and anthologies. He has three collections of poems, *South of Everywhere*, *Mechanic on Duty*, and *The Odd Testament*, to be published in the spring 2013. He is currently working on his fourth book of poetry, *Sundays Kill More Men Than Bombs*.

SHERBROOKE LEA CARSON is a communications major, enrolled full time at CSM. Proud mother of three beautiful children, she says, "I have been richly blessed beyond what I could ever hope to deserve."

CHRISTIE D'ANGELO, in the community relations department at the College of Southern Maryland, enjoys toting around her camera to capture moments in time during her travels.

EILEEN DOHERTY studied at CSM with Neal Dwyer. She also has studied at the University of Maryland with poets Rod Jellema and Reed Whittemore. Previously, she workshopped with Diane Wakoski and Peter Viereck in New York. Eileen lives in Southern Maryland.

SEAN FROST is a drafter, working for a fire engineering company. He uses the scale in the photo every day.

DESIREE GLASS is currently a public high school teacher, has 25 years of experience, teaching all ages, from infant to adult. Her writing has appeared regularly in *The Times-Crescent* and *First Place 4 Health*, an e-newsletter of a national faith-based healthy living program. Her writing was also featured in the April 2012 issue of *Guideposts*. She has sponsored a high school literary magazine and spearheaded annual Poetry Out Loud events. Desiree earned her MA in education at Notre Dame of Maryland University and her BS in business at Salisbury University. She is the mother of three children and grandmother of Addie.

WAYNE KARLIN is a professor of languages and literature at CSM. He is the author of seven novels and three non-fiction memoirs. His stories and articles have been widely published in literary magazines and anthologies. He is the recipient of the Paterson Prize in Fiction, The Vietnam Veterans of America Excellence in the Arts Award, and two Fellowships in Fiction from the National Endowment for the Arts.

WENDY KIBLER is an adjunct instructor in the Languages and Literature Division at the College of Southern Maryland. When she isn't grading papers, she writes, draws, and paints.

LYDIA KIVRAK, 15, has been a part-time student at CSM since last year. Last semester, she took Creative Writing at St. Mary's College of Maryland. She has won several regional gold key awards for poetry in the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards.

JEREMY D. LAMBERT is a US Air Force veteran. In 2009, he received an Afghanistan Campaign medal for his participation in Operation Enduring Freedom, as well as a second place medal for poetry, in 1999, for participating in the NAACP Actso program in Hampton, Virginia. Born on Andrews Air Force Base, Lambert currently resides in Waldorf, MD. He is enrolled as an English major at CSM. Lambert is a devout reader as well as an avid writer. He ultimately hopes to become an English professor and accomplished author and poet.

SOPHIA MINSHALL is currently a student of the College of Southern Maryland and vice president of the college's Phi Theta Kappa chapter. She will be graduating this spring with a degree in environmental technology. After graduation, she plans to combine her admiration of travel and photography by capturing her journey along the Eastern Shore.

WILLIAM POE is the author of *African-Americans of Calvert County*. His photography exhibition, "My African-American Community: A Collection of Photographs and Stories 2000-2010," just completed a one-year exhibit tour. He is a contributing writer for the *Chesapeake Current*.

APRIL RAMEY is a wife and mother of three beautiful children. She has been taking pictures since she was young. As her children grew, she photographed them as well as anyone else willing to smile. With hard work and dedication, she has been able to build her own photography business "Starrella Photography." Her picture is her oldest daughter, Abriella. It was taken at Shenandoah National Park.

ANNA READEN is a student at the College of Southern Maryland majoring in business administration. She has an interest in various styles of photography and has been taking photographs for six years.

WILLIAM READEN is nineteen years old, interested in outdoor photography, and soon to be enrolling in college.

BENJAMIN SLOAN is originally from Missouri though he has lived in North Carolina, New York, and now in Charlottesville, Virginia. Formerly, he was a co-editor of *Thirst* (with Vyt Bakaitis), and he also edited *Mothers of Mud*. He has seen his poetry published in the *Cream City Review*, *Transformations*, *Privates*, and other journals.

DEE SYDNOR is a wife, mother of four, and grandmother of one (with one on the way). She is an adjunct instructor of English at CSM, works as a document librarian for a local contractor, and is a student in West Virginia Wesleyan's MFA Fiction program. She writes in her spare time, and feels most fortunate to have reading and writing stories as her homework assignments.

PAUL TOSCANO has been with CSM since 1980, working first as a counselor, then as distance learning coordinator.

GEORGE L. WHITE was born and raised in Maryland and currently lives in La Plata, works in Washington, DC and attends the College of Southern Maryland La Plata Campus. He welcomes learning and especially enjoys English and psychology, and it is the combination of these two that are at the heart of his writing. He has written dozens of poems and a few short stories and feels like it's time to get serious about publishing.



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