

*Mark Belair*

## **The Ocean**

The calm blue ocean  
out the open cottage door presents  
a great simplicity, makes the busy interior—the kitchen  
pots and pans, the space heaters, even the rockers on  
the porch—

seem too precious, too  
formed to fit us, too devoted to tending  
to everyday needs; and while the great ocean  
cannot offer one simple answer it does ask one simple  
question

we find ourselves ever  
unable to answer—unless you count  
simple devotion to all that has offered devotion  
through our long, complicated, weathering years—  
starting with

these dinged pots and pans, these balky space heaters,  
these salt-scraped rockers on the porch  
that hold us  
still.

## Afternoon Dreams

During afternoon naps, I often  
dream of death.

Nothing  
melodramatic.

Just how, one day,  
I won't be.

No more unusual than  
a turn of breeze.

Or than a child, after playing out,  
running in.

At night I dream  
the usual jumbled opera

of my life, its clashes  
jolting me awake.

So I get sleepy  
late in the afternoon

and—needing a rest  
from myself—

dream of life  
absent me.

## the storm

rain so glazed the windshield / that my grandmother  
couldn't see / so she pulled off to wait out the storm

the windows steamed up / and the sky further darkened / as  
we listened to the violent thunder

*just pépère bowling in heaven* my grandmother said / to  
calm me and my big sister / though neither of us was scared

then a whimpering neared / frightened barking / then claws  
began desperately scratching / down the outside of my back  
door

i cleared my fogged window / and a black dog / yellow  
teeth bared / shot at my hand

now i was scared

then my grandmother cried *he'll scratch my door clean of  
paint / let him in*

i couldn't do it / so my sister / sensing advantage / reached  
across me and the gangly dog / wet and wild / lunged inside  
/ scampered around our unsatisfactory laps / then settled in  
the well at my raised-up feet

each petrified / him of the thunder / me of him / we both  
panted / chests working like crazed accordions / as the  
windy rain streaked the windows / hammered the roof /  
rocked the car / the thunder moving directly overhead

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then after one especially nasty clap / our eyes helplessly  
met / and the dog / sensing a compatriot in fear / if not its  
cause / snuffled his cold / wet snout into my scrunched-up  
legs / and i / emboldened by his humble appeal / gingerly  
patted his head

then he licked my hand and / though that was gross / we  
both began to breathe again

when the storm at last subsided / and pepere / and his dark  
bowling / grew remote / i opened my door and the dog  
jumped out and trotted off

*poor thing* / my grandmother said as she started the car.

then we drove off / windows clearing / the sun / breaking  
through the clouds / surprisingly warm

## Skeeter

Considering the open red convertible  
and its dreadlocked driver approaching

the stoplight at my crosswalk, I expected  
bouncing reggae or kick-drum-driven rap

to rule the soft summer night, so was  
surprised to hear the helpless, plaintive cry

of Skeeter Davis lamenting lost love—  
a loss, for her, “the end of the world”—

the driver—sporting sunglasses in the dark—  
belting along, shoulders twisting with grief,

and I found myself, while crossing the street,  
chiming in, as transported by utter devastation

as they, all our accents  
clashing, the convertible,

at the change of the light, tearing off  
into the night, their voices fading, me

left humming of what  
bonds us all.