

Paige Cerulli

LAMENT FOR CHRISTMAS ON CAPE COD

I once raced the dog up and down South Cape Beach
amongst sea spray and decrepit seaweed
and December's marsh stink,
watched the all-season seagull land at our birdfeeder.
Oh, for the cranberry bogs they flooded, bright sea of bobbing red,
the give way to tired bushes to shrivel into night's frost.

I taught the family dog to jump snowbanks twice her height;
when she slipped her collar she never even saw the car.
The dolphin washed up beachside, distended stomach,
swarm of beach walkers to stare at the shame of it all.
Deep shelter of Crane Conservation Land, the powerlines hum,
the trail best left for galloping,
how the family home shrinks with each visit,
cinnamon smell not my own,
car trimmings growing in the yard,
how badly the shutters need paint.

My pony's body excavated, his bones now long gone,
replaced by a house foundation.

The high school reunion—impromptu, scattered affair—
that I will skip, not even having a title for myself.
College auditions, tendonitis,
the light display on the Falmouth Green that was almost a salve
with Santa's reindeer catapulting the sleigh
twenty feet overhead.

Maybe it's that change sits bitter—
goodbye, old haunts. Goodbye quiet wooded trails, goodbye
to the family dog and cat, goodbye to handwriting I recognized,
and goodbye to telephone numbers reduced to muscle memory.

The pond landing where I sprained my ankle
an hour before a marching band performance.
The sandy trail where my father taught me how to tell
deer from raccoon from coyote tracks.
Target practice with a 32-pound bow in the backyard.

The gravel hilled driveway and learning to rock my standard
out of the snow.

Oh, unreliable snowplows and power outages, oh the year Mom forgot
to buy wrapping paper, oh the stories that have already faded
so much to always be lost. Oh, the time the fifteen-pound turkey
was bad. Oh, sand dunes, oh jetties, oh horse-drawn carriages
in Mashpee Commons. Oh, coyotes howling in the backyard,
oh lonely song, oh, if only I'd learned to sing it
on my own.