Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal

Volume 10 | Issue 1 Article 21

June 2010

Who Shall Be Captain?

Weston Cutter

Follow this and additional works at: https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate

Recommended Citation

Cutter, Weston (2010) "Who Shall Be Captain?," *Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal*: Vol. 10: Iss. 1, Article 21. Available at: https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate/vol10/iss1/21

This Poetry is brought to you for free and open access by The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). It has been accepted for inclusion in Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal by an authorized editor of The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). For more information, please contact ORB@binghamton.edu.

Cutter: Who Shall Be Captain?

WHO SHALL BE CAPTAIN? Weston Cutter

When we were younger we caught snakes, held them by their tails while they writhed and flailed, kept them in buckets till our sisters got incensed+dumped them, gave us our first lessons in false liberation

but then we quit catching live wildness
like that. Caught instead
colds and itches for girls or smoke, caught
each other cheating on each other with
each other's girl(s), so when
I was talking with J three night back and saw

the mouse on the orange couch I thought
just for a second
I should get a cage but instead bought traps,
two old wood ones and one black plastic
square thing that has
a circular pit to put the peanut butter in it

and three days I watched, waited, heard
the fucker rustling
in the papers I'll never bother making real
places for, and when I woke this morning
the trap snapped
not two minutes after I'd woken from a dream

I'd been having about that time we spent a whole summer day

Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal, Vol. 10, Iss. 1 [2010], Art. 21

throwing rocks at our street's streetsign, never throwing hard or big enough rocks to dent the thing, and of course the trap didn't kill the mouse, just caught his

(I just assume it was a him) back legs
and by the time I got out
from under the sheets, the mouse had squirmed
almost half a foot, had—with the trap locked
onto his ass and back legs—
moved to bury himself under some papers—

an empty candy box, a newspaper I read only one story in. Had buried himself like to save me the trouble. They didn't always get to the snakes: once, we figured we'd beat our sisters to the punch, caught a snake, toyed with it,

dropped it into a bucket and for awhile dropped
lit matches on it till
we got bored and tipped it over, grabbed
one of our dad's axes, chopped the thing into
pieces no bigger than the halfsize candybars we got on Halloween. When

I saw the mouse the first time I thought

rabies and cute simultaneously,
and I know I knew, as I undid the trap
outside, a block away, underneath a dying tree,
the frost glittering in sunlight,
that he was already basically dead—couldn't

Cutter: Who Shall Be Captain?

(or didn't) move once I set him facing east—
that maybe the good thing
would've been a quick stomp from a big boot.
Maybe not. I left him there, facing sunrise,
convinced myself
I only killed him because I had to, him or me,

my health vs. his. Told myself there was some honor or decency in leaving him out like that, religious beneath the winter tree, all in sunlight. And when I came back in I made breakfast and set the trap again.