

By Ralph Sneed (all rights reserved). This poem first appeared in *Hayden's Ferry Review* and then in the book, *Evidence of the Journey* (Harmon Blunt Publishers, 2007).

Peconic

“The 1935 Thorndike-Century Junior Dictionary, intended for children between the ages of ten and fifteen – the age when children start to relish exploring by themselves – defines landscape as ‘a view of the land’ and ‘picture showing a land scene,’ but is silent about seascape, perhaps with good reason.”

John R. Stilgoe, *A Shallow Water Dictionary*

I.

Driftwood pylons driven
into bay's floor, with mesh
stretched between. Seaweed
tatters at waterline, rescue
notes ignored, forgotten.
We dreamt of throes, the entangled
collected while we slept.

II.

The word *tentacle* wrapped us
in the thriving water.
Fish with wings and legs,
stilettos, mythic spurs.
We swam with sneakers. Once
you trod the horseshoe crab
you'd never grow again.

III.

Jeans hardened on the line
like garments of the drowned.
Salt corroded zippers
and turned the rivets green.
Pockets bulged with violet
shells, worthless (currency,
we'd heard, before our time).

IV.

Oracle of damp recesses,
the outdoor shower's stubborn,
voyeuristic toad, married
to the leaking copper. Hot
wind across the threshold
from burnt lawn, despite her
auguries of mold and shame.

V.

Poacher's remnants beneath
the red question: poison
ivy wrapping scrub oak.
Like quotations, deer legs
severed in sand. Held,
the hooves replaced the hands
beyond my sleeves. My own.

VI.

Black men, orange rental
boats, their dangerous voyage
through the locks to either
white-capped bay. Marooned
on concrete, we pierced our fingers
on barbs of shrimp, released
bails to punish the bait.

VII.

Wasteland of broken razor
clams when the tide was out,
the lagoon was ruled by blueclaws
when water flushed back through.
Reproached by the spit's swollen,
shimmering eye, we waded
behind our nets' shadows.

VIII.

Blowfish in kitchen sink
inside-out. The glistening
bladder, burst with knife-
blade: what, once inflated,
deflected predators' jaws.
Hooked, it rose to surface.
We didn't have to reel.

IX.

Anchored in our inlet,
the dredge a Trojan horse
against the dawn. By noon,
derrick and scoop were clearing
sand, deepening channel
for bigger keels and wakes,
shark fins nailed to piers.

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Memory cups what never
lives again. We knew
our place by necks, enclosing
bluffs, the brittle casings
around the dead; opened,
miniature whelk poured out,
the future washed to shore.