

Charles Rammelkamp

Shiva

Full of my World Religions class,
I returned home from college
when my Uncle Howie died,
my mother's little brother,
youngest of six siblings.

“The first to go,” Aunt Rozzie sobbed,
the oldest of the bunch;
their parents a decade gone,
they the older generation now.
All of them wailed,
and I felt insufficiently sad,
as much as I'd loved my uncle.

We'd just been studying Hinduism in class –
reincarnation, the illusory world of Samsara,
of which this grief was a part.
The mirrors covered, we sat shiva,
and I reflected on Shiva,
creator-destroyer god in the Hindu pantheon.

“A coronary,” I heard Mom moan
to a friend. “Who knew
Howie's heart was weak?”
As if blaming herself:
the whole solid world crumbled
into the dust of illusion.

I was nineteen and immortal –
one indistinguishable drop
in the ocean of the oversoul –
taking comfort in Samadhi,
knowing none of this was real.

TMI

Chubby blond Barbara
with the big tan legs
perches by the pool
on her lifeguard throne,
her crotch about level with my nose
when I pass by her from the locker room
on my way to an early morning swim.

“Hi there!” she whistle-caws down to me,
a bird of prey watching
the field mouse scuttling by.

“How are you?” I respond,
looking toward the pool for an open lane.
I am hoping for a “fine” or “OK” or “so-so,”
a single-note birdsong
Instead, she launches into her boyfriend

problems. He’s been cheating on her,
which she’s been telling to everyone
over the years she’s presided at the pool.
It’s almost a stand-up routine;
she delivers all the details
with a Phyllis Diller deadpan –
his evasive excuses, the lipstick smears,
the scent of another woman.

It’s hard to get away from her
as she prattles on.
You can almost read the half-hour sitcom
script scrolling through her head.
Out of the corner of my eye I see
a young woman in a two-piece
stepping up to the last lane
while Barbara delivers the zinger
before we cut to a commercial break:
“He can’t even get it up for me.”

Melting

“The trees,” Brenda cries,
her voice hoarse with held-smoke,
“they’re melting.”

Kenny and I dart eyes
at one another,
two sixteen-year old boys
with the same lustful thoughts
for our classmate, Brenda,
rumored to be loose.

Now we have to decide
if she’s freaking out,
having a psychotic breakdown
demanding responsible action.
Should we try to reassure her?
Call a doctor?
Notify her parents?
But we’re high!
Can we even pull something like that off?

An eternal pause swells
with our indecision,
and then, spontaneous as fire,
we double over, tears in our eyes.
It’s 1967, the psychedelic
summer of love,
Brenda’s first time getting high;
she wants a transcendental experience,

but all she can do, now,
our laughter soaring
to the hilarious heights
of the stoned,
is blush, embarrassed.

Just for One Day

“Daddy, you’re my hero.”
The freckle-faced little girl, teeth missing,
looks up at her dad with adoring eyes.

“I love you, Mom,”
a boy with a wayward cowlick
lisps at his mother, then salutes.

It’s a TV commercial
for some sort of military insurance,
in a break from the ESPN action,
news guys recapping last night’s games.
I’m in the locker room,
dressing after my morning swim.

“I guess that’s why my kids
never told me I was a hero,”
I quip to the guy at the next locker.

He frowns, as if my joke is in bad taste,
not that he’s ever going to serve, either,
some sort of corporate type.

Ever since Nine Eleven
the cult of the warrior’s soared,
along with all its commercial applications,
selling cars, houses, beer.

Vietnam vets aim for retroactive respect,
shaming us for spitting on them
when they came home from the war.
One war’s just as good as the next, right?

Charles Rammelkamp lives in Baltimore. His latest books are *Mixed Signals* (2014) from Finishing Line Press and *Mata Hari: Eye of the Day* (2015) from Apprentice House. Charles edits an online literary journal called *The Potomac*. He is also the Prose Editor for BrickHouse Books in Baltimore.