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## Dear Reader:

As I begin writing this on a Tuesday morning late in May of 2006, Barbaro lives. And although it may seem like a digression—to begin this second issue of the CWC Journal with talk of a race horse—his story takes us to the heart of the matter: why we bother to write, and why you might take the time to read.

I'm sure most of you are familiar with the sad details that emerged from last weekend's running of the Preakness. Hopefully by the time this reaches you, events will not have taken a tragic turn back from this morning's good news. But even if they did, the meaning of Barbaro's story would not be diminished. It's a story that I first began following after he ran away with this year's Kentucky Derby. I'm not a racing aficionado, but I'm a sports fan, and every so often the Triple Crown reminds us why people love sports. So, after reading that Barbaro was a serious Triple Crown threat, I jumped on the bandwagon.

My first act of worship was to watch the video of the race that I'd only read about—this year's Derby. The moment when Barbaro comes down the stretch, full stride, pulling powerfully away from the other horses, head thrusting forward and speeding through the sunny Kentucky air toward the finish in an athlete's full glory—it is the reason we watch anything at all: to witness beauty. Since you already know I'm a poet, I'm not ashamed to admit that I can sometimes be an emotional witness. So, yes, when I first watched Barbaro coming down the stretch at the Kentucky Derby, I cried. I think it was because I could see his joy. I could see how much he loved the thing he was doing at that moment, his pleasure in doing it well, the confluence of where he was striving for and where he was. I could see that he was in the very center of the most thrilling moment of his life, doing in full stride that thing that he had learned to do with such perfection. It was enough—as the saying goes—to bring a grown man to tears.

By the day the Preakness had come around, I was convinced that Barbaro was the antidote for all the wretchedness that sports has been feeding us so far this century. It is a wretchedness symbolized by Barry Bonds' joyless and Mephistophelean home run quest—a

quest he was seeking on the other side of the country that very same afternoon.

In the starting gate in Maryland, Barbaro was fiesty, busting out twice before the race began. It was ironic, I thought, that these days it takes another species to remind us of that “human spirit” missing from so much of the rest of sport. Of course, we know what happened next. That feistiness, that desire, burst out of the start and promptly shattered Barbaro's right hind leg—transforming that magnificent gait into a horrifying, nauseating stutter-step.

With the crack of a bat somewhere near that other ocean, less than an hour later, Bonds matched Babe Ruth.

Those who are familiar with horses or racing knew that Barbaro's injury was not merely something that would end his days on the track—it could end his life. For a variety of medical reasons, horses that cannot walk will ultimately suffer painful deaths. If Barbaro were to survive, within days he would need to somehow stand on a leg that had been broken into more than twenty pieces.

I am not naive, and I know that the sport of horse racing has its own ugliness. Part of that ugliness is the fact that simply by choosing to race these horses, we place them in unnecessary risk. So some may see Barbaro's story as yet another grotesque—like Bonds' ego-swelled, steroid-bloated head, just another symbol of America's oversized appetite for manufactured glory. And I almost chose not to write about Barbaro, because I wasn't sure how to get past this paragraph. But while I was reading about horse racing facing its own steroid issues, I found a quote from a breeder that reminded me of what I was trying to say:

“A horse ought to be himself.”

Indeed. A horse ought to be himself. The truth is that I don't know exactly what logic makes me cry watching Barbaro and shudder watching Bonds. But I can feel it. I can feel the horse being himself, can sense his joy

in being. The latest science says that we animals have “mirror neurons” in our brains that give us the empathy to feel what other creatures experience as we bear witness. So maybe that’s why I loved watching Barbaro, because his joy became my joy. Maybe I want none of Bonds’ seething disdain running through my own veins.

Maybe it’s okay to believe that there are things to believe in. Maybe one of those things can be a beautiful horse being himself.

## The Man

I keep trying to start the story somewhere else, but the only place to begin is the square of light on the side of the building—this epic square of light. A hundred foot square of amber light broadcast onto the towering, windowless, gray-tinged granite wall of the building across the parkway. You had caught view of it from your seat at the hotel bar, in the silence while Andy smoked a Marlboro Light and you drank the free vodka from Happy Hour. This happened at the end, after the man had already gotten up and left. You were sitting there thinking about it when you saw the square of light out the atrium window; the whole sky behind the other building was dark.

The man had been talking to a friend, and they both lived in the apartments at the hotel—guys in their sixties, never married, professional. Drinkers, the type. The other guy was the heavier kind—more sturdy than fat—bald and wearing a yellow golf shirt. The man was thin, a dead-ringer for George Carlin, and smoking the cigarette. His friend had the cigar. The man was telling his friend about the cancer, that he was a goner. He was four or five bloody marys into the evening, and you couldn’t tell if it was the liquor or the dying in his voice. But he was completely straight about it. “No funeral. I want a five-thousand dollar drunk. And I mean *drunk*. A five-thousand dollar drunk. And I want to be cremated. No funeral. This is it. I’ve gotta make plans.” And his friend, he was almost like he was trying to talk him out of it, the dying. Everyone always wants to talk about surviving.

But the man wasn’t having any of it. This was it and he knew it, that’s what he said. And he kept saying the

On Monday morning, after six hours of surgery, Barbaro stood on his shattered limb. He stood again Tuesday. As I finish writing this on a Wednesday morning late in May of 2006, Barbaro lives.

*rsalvador, cwc editor*



other parts over again. The part about the five-thousand dollar drunk, about the cremating. At one point he gave instructions about where he wanted the ashes to be scattered—some places in the mountains nearby, a forest he mentioned by name. By now his friend was feeling stunned and the man was starting to get more sentimental. His arms looked skinny and pale in the gray t-shirt, and after his friend walked away the man started crying. You could hear it behind your shoulder, but you didn’t look. In a moment, he stood up and left. Later you told Andy that you didn’t know if you should have said anything, that you thought about it. Sometime afterwards, it got quiet and you turned your head toward the atrium’s wall of windows and saw the square of light.

~CWC

## Hillside

When you live on the side of a hill, your home pops and creaks in a struggle to remain perpendicular to the radius of the earth. You find that it is more difficult to identify what is level. As you walk from room to room, you observe contrasting lines—the top of a window frame, the surface of a table, a fence in the yard—and you are unable to determine which line is true. You might at first take a carpenter’s level and place it against these surfaces, and you are likely to find that most of them bring the bubble to the center, and then you are likely to note that the carpenter’s level is an imprecise calibrator, and that the irregularity in the lines is noticeable because of their length and relative position

and because your eye is a remarkably precise calibrator. So you resign yourself to the notion that all the surfaces can't be level and you stop taking measurements and you eyeball the irregularities less often, but there remains a residue of discontent and discomfort that you can't scrub away by telling yourself that it's just the nature of life on the side of a hill. Your children don't notice these irregularities. To them, your house on the side of the hill is regular. You watch them running in a row through the dining room and turning sharply into the hall, where the floor boards have buckled just slightly where they meet the carpet, suggesting an irregularity in the surfaces. But the irregularity of the surface doesn't slow their pace, and they don't appear to make any adjustments: they just roll over it as a crow rides out an unexpected breeze. And then you begin to wonder if level, perpendicular, parallel are inherently good, and you wonder where you first learned to believe that, or whether it is instinctive.

In the future, there will be races of human beings uniquely adapted to living on the sides of hills. The floors and ceilings of their houses will slope along with the hillside, and the walls may be perpendicular to the hillside, or they may not: it won't matter. Rather than seeking true level, their houses will be optimized to allow the most light, or increase the chances that you will have an encounter with a friend. These people will adapt in different ways. Some will develop tiny feet and short, narrow, extremely strong legs. They will walk with incredible grace and care over any irregular surface, and will have no fear of heights. Other people will have a shorter side and a longer side—most notable, the legs—as if they were drawn in perspective, rotated away slightly. They will always walk with the shorter side against the slope, so that they can remain erect. They will learn to walk backwards as efficiently as forwards, so when they need to go up or down, they can traverse the hill, as in a series of switchbacks. You see that both types of people will adapt according to the need to remain erect, with their necks and heads pointing away from the center of the earth, because that is the way we are most comfortable. But they will be happier, because they will worry less about what is level and what is true.

Except for one elderly man, one with a shorter side, who lived his life on the hillside, and who worked very hard as a carpet layer in his hillside town, laying carpet for 45 years on all the sloping floors in all the irregular homes until callouses formed so thickly on the backs of his knuckles that he couldn't hold a cup. "My barnacles," he called them, when his grandchildren touched them and inquired in a way that would be rude if they were adults. And although he was glad to have worked so hard and seen his children and grandchildren grow and thrive out of his work, and find homes of their own on the hillside, and cover the floors of their hillside homes with carpet, the elderly man had a yearning since he was a very small boy to walk across the flat land. He had visions of a prairie, where you could see as far as the horizon would permit, where perspectives of trees and barns in varying distances appeared subtle at first but eventually would take your breath away. They weren't dreams—they were visions, that drifted into his thoughts like high cirrus clouds. They appeared most often when he was feeling tired or sad. And so one morning, when he felt death creeping up from the bottom of the hill, he decided that it was time, and he took the conveyance that they used in the future—a sort of floating train—out of the hillside town and across the mountains and over the desert and out to a small town that clustered around a crossroads in the middle of the vast great plains. He got off the train with some difficulty—and some help from plains people whose sides were symmetrical and who regarded the elderly man as a cripple—and began a long, swaying walk out of the town and into the surrounding fields. Plains people who saw him later remarked that he was like a metronome, rocking in perfect time. When he had walked far enough that the town was small and distant, and he felt satisfied that he was truly in the middle of the great plains, the elderly man out of instinct stood straight up on his longer leg, and extended his arms directly outward and squinted at the hazy and indistinct horizon, like a scarecrow.

~CIC

# Things I'm Not Long For

This morning I decided to be apples  
and grain, harvested. Only  
it is past harvest now, the strawberry  
signs say "last chance." Some signs are  
hard to ignore. The bread  
was nearly a month old, refrigerated and turning  
to stone. I tried to shave the edges  
the way I've saved the core of the cheese,  
but the ash of what would remain  
was trapped inside. Impossible to separate.

I cut a cold tomato with a dull knife.  
It smells like dirt and watermelons, even the seeds  
stay wrapped in each cheek. The climate of  
change, I do not interrupt. Your father,

you. My father, me  
there is a showdown, a line-up; everyone coming  
around the corner to market hunger. We are  
a family of chefs. I do the slicing, the taste-test.  
I am the most crucial. Once, working  
in a kitchen for pay, I cut my finger. A cook  
met me at the sink, wrapped it tight  
like a pig in a blanket. I didn't  
look down. A kitchen trick.

# Some Fruit

It is not by default that the apples, petals  
on the ground call  
out to be brought  
to table.

What logic we lack, thinking there is  
worth in the wind when it won't even sweep  
what belongs together by design.

The trumpet, sax, some car horn has  
all the attention. Loud, long with lust,  
it strays from purpose  
toward power. Like the stubborn clocks  
lining the mantle. They only know  
what has been: some fruit,  
too heavy to wait  
for your hand, must be  
bent down for  
to be had.

# Breakfast With Scott and Michelle

Scott was talking to me about a parrot and poetry. And although the combination may sound odd,

Scott — his small tuft of hair falling backwards, his legs crossed, and his arms flapping with authority — could tell me anything. I was only drinking a cup of coffee. And honestly, I figured,

what did it matter who, anymore, in this entire city, country, or even this over-crowded little coffeeshop wanted to tell me how to write, or how they were writing poetry?

But the eggs, the eggs were a bit runny; and Michelle was busy picking just the center out of her sweet roll; and the walls, if I remember, had prints of sailboats on them.

I heard Scott say, again, how it must be easy to write poetry; how he once read a poem about a man who had climbed to the very top branch of a neighboring tree, only to fall

and become a pet parrot in his wife's kitchen. I didn't question him. What good would it do, when the L train screeching above would have drowned out whole chunks of my sentences?

## Partial Index of the History of the Moon

animals, the first time, marking, stabbing, *interbody broadcast*

arrivals of memory, *craters*

earth is near, its oceans intimate, the tides rising past mountains trying to escape to us, *all the knowledge of tides & a mirror on the moon reflecting distance*

You were here for all of it, part of you, everything  
That makes you was witness. What is it about you that doesn't  
Remember? Was there not enough beautiful? Weren't the tides  
At such size of impossible consequence? And the animals  
Feckless? What is it—that you rely on such puny recalcitrations?



# **This Is to Be Unbound**

CONSCIOUSNESS, Always—Due to transformation into a condition of ideas, attachment to mechanical generators will ultimately cease. No information is available regarding what will follow.

I'd even forgotten what I was doing.

## Confluence If Your Life Were Rivers

A Thing In This Place X

Y Yesterday

Y Possible

Deciduous Autumn X

Z

Happening; Vessel

Y - LIFE OF IMAGINATION OR MEMORY

X - LIFE OF METAPHOR

Z - LIFE OF BODY

A beautiful momentum has washed you  
Into this. It arrived at you—waiting long  
Enough in nothing to be caught where  
This was going. If it weren't only still on  
Its way, thrashing into that next part, where the story  
Goes, where it loses you, where you are  
The wake, leaving forms in the suggestion of what passed, the way all forms  
Diminish, not meaning the same thing later, never giving  
Full account of what it was  
To be along the way.