

What Remains

SHYLA SHILOH SHYLOW.

The lower jaw had been stripped clean, long ago, of every edible or digestible morsel, its bony remnant now of a grayish hue tinged with an effervescent mossy green; it lies along the wooded pathway ringing the swamp, its teeth still in their sockets facing upwards. The skull proper lies nearby, its teeth also pointing skyward, the balance of the skeleton variously arrayed in close proximity, some bones obviously missing; others are scattered, reposing upon our Mother's soggy breast.

'Tis all that remains of Shyla, the family milking cow, who passed on two days after birthing Julio, who at this writing was two and a half years old, weighing nearly seven-hundred pounds. His days are numbered; perhaps another year will round out his term; he exists as a portable burgeoning trove of red meat who ranges the island brush and occasional pasturage.

Shyla's career ended as a matter of course, her continuum rising to its zenith, only to decline, following so many wondrous impregnations, calvings and milkings, mysteriously catabolizing all the while, until finally cascading into her nadir.

She had expired in the barn. In order to move the defunct organism, the farmer resorted to the chainsaw for partial dismemberment. He then enlisted the aid of Karl with his battered two-tone DORF pickup, her carcass tied with ropes to the rear bumper, to be dragged unceremoniously over grass and marl, gravel, rock, stump, sheep droppings, cowpies and horsebuns, to be deposited out of sight as fodder and delectation for carrion feeders, flies and maggots.

When I passed by during the previous year, the beast had been lying in state beside the pathway for some six months; her bones appeared whiter then, without the traces of moss, and still bearing some semblance of her former self, with a good deal of her holstein's black and white hide lying somewhat draped over and clinging to her mostly undisturbed skeleton.

Now, this one year later, I thought I perceived myself, as in some crypt, after one and a half years, all indices of my me-ness having fallen to this abysmal anonymity, even the hideous hide that had sustained all the storms, pricks and barbs, and contained the scars of the world's triflings; all having become morsel for some bacterial continuum.

For the most part Shyla had lain in peace, although exposed to all those aforementioned ravishings, her disturbance occasioned by the snortings, stompings and fartings of Red, the old wandering gelding from down the road, her most constant companion; he liked to pasture nearby. Occasionally the untended sheep, gone feral, whose trails crisscross the whole wide world; and the wild ducks, who secret, rest and converse amongst themselves in the rushes of the swamp a few yards

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away; and the footsteps of the farmer and his Mrs., and ones such as I, intrude upon her exposed and protracted decay.

As if death and decay were not enough for Shyla to endure, she must listen to the fatal firings of the 30-30 beneath the hanging tree, where her brethren are coaxed, to be greeted by the inevitable deliverer; she hears their dying gasps, as their life's blood gurgles from their severed jugglers, as their bodies lie in a spasmodic quivering, their brains riven, splattered and disconnected. Alas!, We are carnivores.

The hanging tree, from which the lifeless carcasses are hung, suspended from a beam jammed into their splayed rear hocks, hauled ass skyward as a 'four-by' or backhoe pulls the rope reeving the blocks attached to the tree limb and the beam. The hanging tree, in whose proximity, Patrick, her very own son wailed his last at a year and a half and nine-hundred pounds; where he was gutted, his innards flopping into the bed of the green battered Japanese pickup to be hauled away, and from whose bed, the Man stood to chain saw his carcass in half.

And the farmer was heard to say: "If this won't turn you into a vegetarian, nothing will". The smell of warm blood, and the odor of disembowelment, and chain-sawed flesh clings to one's nostrils.

And further still Shyla's peacefully askewed repose must endure the sounds of the farm, the whine and roar of the irrigation pump sucking away from the swamp, and that awful bratt titta rattitta neeeeeaaarrrrh of the piranha chain saw, and the cacophonous, unmuffled vehicular din of the island's four-wheeled participation in the modern world, as it bumbles down the dirt road, and the whop, whop, whop, whop of the whirly birds overhead in search of cannabis (how many joints did you eat in your travels Shyla?).

Sorry Shyla, even here on this remoter island, there isn't any real repose. Burial would have muffled the sounds, but not granted thee greater distinction; for the world must go on. It may revere its dead, but it cannot hesitate in its onward and upward mania, as you may have discovered somewhat, even with your bovine intelligence.

Julio will be the last; perhaps next year; then there will be no more, Shyla. Small comforts.

And the air in these climes, though damp at times, is fresh; the breezes blow often, rushing through, bending the trunks and bowers overhead, creating a symphony of whisperings, then, sometimes demonic howlings, as the Southeasters roar and moan. How much better this, than burial?

Although you are no longer about, your semblance is evoked; one is startled into a remembrance, unlike one might be who is buried beneath a pithy orthodox headstone.

And what words would one trouble to carve for thee on a bare pair of boards nailed together, emulating the Crucifix, farmer-fashion, driven into the earth, all cockeyed to thy gravity?

Smile Shyla. Moo once, for Red; for all of us.