

Charles Rammelkamp

Cutting My Losses

“If two men are fighting and the wife of one of them comes to rescue her husband from his assailant, and she reaches out and seizes him by his genitals, you shall cut off her hand. Show her no pity.” *Deuteronomy 25:11-12*

“Is that a roll of quarters
in your pocket,
or are you just glad to see me?”

“What?”

Confusion clouded Rocky’s face,
already dim with a kind of perpetual incomprehension.
Besides, he was already distracted,
his arm around my throat in a stranglehold.

Rita had even less patience
for stupidity than I did,
which is how I got into the fight
with Rocky in the first place.
She’d made a disparaging remark
about his intelligence, comparing him
to her neighbor’s rheumy-eyed dog
a slobbering, slow-moving mutt
that smelled like a fetid swamp.
When I laughed,
Rocky came after me.

“*What?*” Rita mimicked Rocky,
making her voice sound so dumb
you could almost see
the knuckles dragging across the floor.

Her hand curled like a hawk's talon,
Rita reached for the bump in his pants,
squeezed as if ringing out a wet rag.

“Yow!” Rocky screamed, releasing me.
I ran. Rita was an admirable girl,
but I knew she wasn't
so good for my health and well-being.

Highwire Act

“Cool! Like the Flying Wallendas?” I gushed
when our niece told us
she was working in a circus in New England.

“No, I just sell tickets,” Sissy clarified.
She wasn’t apologizing
but she tacitly conceded
hers was not the glamorous lion tamer,
trapeze artist, acrobat kind of job,
but it still made a good story:
I quit college and joined the circus!

I reflected that Nik Wallenda may have been
the first person to walk a tightrope
stretched across Niagara Falls,
but his great-grandfather Karl,
the family patriarch,
fell to his death in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

And Maria Rasputin, the mad monk’s daughter?
Mauled by a bear in Peru, Indiana,
while she was working as an animal trainer
for Barnum and Bailey.

I remembered as a kid
wanting to be a baseball player,
hit homeruns and sign autographs.

“You go, girl!” I said to Sissy.
I wondered what she’d be doing
in another ten years.

Charles Rammelkamp is Prose Editor for BrickHouse Books in Baltimore and Reviews Editor for *The Adirondack Review*. A chapbook of poems, *Me and Sal Paradise*, was recently published by FutureCycle Press. An e-chapbook has also recently been published online *Time Is on My Side (yes it is)* –
<http://poetscoop.org/manuscrip/Time%20Is%20on%20My%20Side%20FREE.pdf>