

Trout Fishing in America Shorty lives on after the death of his dear friend Richard Brautigan, though sadly

by James Lloyd Davis

Shorty wondered how anyone with so great a heart as Richard's could fall into the darkness with a gun. He'd not heard from him for so very long, but read about his death in a newspaper someone left in a Starbucks.

He wept.

Later that week, he bummed a ride to a trout stream where he and Richard spent long hours together, fishing, laughing, conversing about life, talking about light bulbs that burn with sincerity, cat tracks on the porcelain, bowling trophies, Jesus and Baudelaire on the road. He offered two Chinese trout fishermen twenty dollars to wheel him out to the middle of the stream and help him build a memorial to Richard.

When they were finished piling the rocks, the Chinese sportsmen stood beside his wheel chair and bowed their heads while Shorty read a poem that Richard had written just for him, one that had never been published. They liked the poem so much they told Shorty to keep his twenty dollars and gave him a ride in their big yellow Humvee... drove him to the nearest bus station.

Shorty took a Greyhound to Philadelphia.

He was tired of trout streams. They would never be the same without Richard in the world.

On the way, he sat in the back of the bus and remembered his friend, how Richard would send him letters, how much he looked forward to reading them. When Richard stopped writing letters, Shorty would buy all his books of poems, his novels. He would read each poem, every book that appeared as if written like a long, funny letter from a somewhat insane friend, an eclectic uncle, or a brother in rehab.

Richard wrote his sweet, smiling poems like letters from a madman, cast about on a one-way stream, like seeding trout for his friends. He wrote his books like messages to Garcia tied to the backs of wandering eagles. Like a friend, like a nephew, like a brother, Shorty read them all.

He wondered how Richard became so depressed as to take his own life.

He thought ... *maybe the darkness came when, after years of writing poems like love letters to God, after years of writing books about things you should never write books about, he waited, like Elijah, by some trout stream gone dry, praying for rain, waiting for ravens to fly in with Wonder Bread and peanut butter sandwiches. No one was there to tell him that the ravens had better things to do, that prophets just don't get saved anymore. Maybe, after years of writing poems like letters, he began to notice that no one ever wrote him back.*

When Shorty got to Philadelphia, he took all his savings and opened a cigar store in the ghetto. There was one long glass display case filled with all manner of cigars, cigarillos, and fine tobaccos in all form and from every corner of the globe.

Shorty had a tall and very comfortable stool installed behind the cash register, right by the door and the front window. He sits there every day, has Mars bars for lunch, and smiles, waves to the people passing by as if he knows all their names.

