



Volume 13
Issue 1
2018

The Come from Away / Stitching Simon Strugnell
/ Eighth Day / Sounding / The Men Who Dug

Lois Leveen

The Come from Away (St. Mary's River, 1941)

She is older and smaller
than me. Than what I
expected. Doesn't smell
like Mentholatum, Mercurochrome,
medicine. Carrying the scent of
someplace-else. A place a man
could walk for weeks from,
and never see an ocean. I see
this sea every day, know wave
and wake and wonder at
this creature. Want to know her.

Twenty-eight to my
nineteen, and not the migratory bird
I imagined, come for a summer
and with a flap of a wing,
gone again. What she flaps
is a crisp white sheet.
Hospital corners they call it,
though it's no hospital, no
doctor here. Just a clinic,

a nurse, come for a summer but
staying forever.

She doesn't know that yet.
Neither do I. We only know
our hearts, beating
flapping like bright white
birds inexplicable against
gray winter sky. Not expecting
how like a pair of birds
we'll make a flock. How like
a flock in flight, we will grow
older, smaller, together.

Stitching Simon Strugnell (Port Hope Simpson, 1946)

Two-years-old and twenty-six
stitches. Brought by motor boat
four hours from William's Harbour,
bit and cut and bleeding, to what
passes in Port Hope Simpson for a surgery:
Gas to put Simon Strugnell
to sleep. A flashlight
his mother holds, illuminating
his small body. And my
two hands, taking
tiny stitches, twenty-six
stitches to Simon Strugnell's
head and neck. Back
in William's Harbour, his grandfather
shoots the untamed huskie pups. He shoots all
the full-grown sled dogs too.

Eighth Day (St. Mary's Bay, 1950)

It is the eighth day
of our second son
and we are on the ocean.
The minister is nine
nautical miles away today.
Tomorrow he leaves
for the season. We are Church
of England, Anglicans
on this inlet of ocean,
bringing our newborn son
across these waters to that
blessèd water to be baptized.

At first the nurse didn't like
to let us go: new mother and new baby
leaving harbour for
where bay broadens into sea.
She could not see how we are now,
new father the skipper
of family skiff, guiding
proud peaked prow
as it cuts across
whatever waves come up.
Our son, curled in receiving
blanket, tiny and mighty in
the way a baby is.

It's too soon Nurse Jupp said.
But eight days is echo
of the ancient covenant
that saved Abraham's son.
And it is eight days longer than
we had our last baby,
dead before he was born.

Sounding (Mary's Harbour, 1954)

A standing tree is no more silent
than a sleeping child. While ours
murmur and stir four to a bed
in Battle Harbour, I go by boat
and foot into St. Mary's woods.
Over soft forest sough
sounds the thwack of my axe,
the broken-branched crash
of what is felled.

Sawing, planing, the soft-pitched
screaming that transforms logs to lumber.
Long hours hand-sanding while groves
and children shudder, slumber. The staccato
of measure, mark, cut, nail up
clapboard walls and rough plank
floors and shallow-gable roof.

When the two-month song is done
I load boat with wife, children,
everything we own. I bring them
home. This is the last house
I will build. Nancy, come too quick
for us to get to the nursing clinic, will cry
her way born in it, here Samuel will be
quietly conceived.

This first night, as family
and framing together
creak to sleep, I hear echo
of the house I built ten years ago.
The roar carried over the Bay, as every
house in this harbour
burned to the ground, including that one
we never had a chance
to make our home.

The Men Who Dug

Deep-voiced in the near-dark
he will tell of how, ten years ago,
while you mourned beneath
Los Angeles sun, he put shovel
to unfrozen Labrador earth
to bury her.

He waits the whole week
of your first visit back
in sixteen years. Is waiting still
this last night, sitting
thick-bearded in your cousin's
near-dark kitchen to tell you,
her full-grown grandson
of Halifax, Boston, California,
Oregon. You who adored
a woman you saw less in your
whole life than anyone here
might see her in a month.

His reverence so strong
he needs you to know how he,
how all the men who dug,
men who've lived here all their lives,
remember her, who lived here longer still.

Lois Leveen is a poet,
novelist (*Juliet's Nurse*
and *The Secrets of Mary*
Bowser), and medical
humanities scholar. Email:
Lois@humanities
forhealth.org