Benjamin O’Keefe

Prof. Garrison

Creative Non-Fiction

9 – 22 – 09

The Fourth Odyssey

It’s that time again, time to pack up everything I own and move it back to Westminster. After three years of doing this it’s become pretty redundant, but this year something seems different. Something in me wants to hide under the covers of my bed and pretend this is just another summer day with a lot more to follow, but I can’t. So I grab another load of my stuff and start heading for the front door. As I walk with my thoughts pounding away at my brain, my foot slams into my open guitar case, sending shooting pains up my foot. All of my things fly out of my arms as a scream “Oh what the ..!” But I quickly gain my composure before my parents get the chance to hear me drop the f-bomb. Not paying much attention to my toe, I take a look at all of my stuff that is now scattered throughout my room, pick it up, and try to make my way to the living room, again.

The pain is still there, but I move into the living room anyway. Like most guys do when they carry things, I grabbed too much, and now have to stop to relieve the burning in my arms and rearrange my awkward stack. As I adjust, I am alarmed by the crimson color I see out of the bottom of my eye. Startled and confused, I look down to find the front part of my left foot covered in my blood. How did this happen?! As I look closer, ignoring the queasy feeling in my stomach, I find the source is a large cut in my small toe. How did I not notice this before? Seeing the flap of skin from the corner of my pinky toe hanging free sends my head spinning, forcing me to sit on the chair where I dropped my things. I yell for my dad, who immediately comes running, probably due to the urgency in my voice and the small trail of blood running from my room to where I sit. I tried to keep my head up, but the room just kept spinning…

“What the hell happened?” I ask my dad as I raise my head from my pillow. “You passed out. Your cut’s pretty gross! I didn’t know a toe could bleed so much without falling off,” he responds with a hint of a laugh in his voice. I’ve never passed out from seeing blood, but I guess I have never been exposed to my own blood to this extreme before. What could have done this to me? I remember stubbing my toe on my guitar case, but how could it… It was open! The steel tabs on the latches of the case are sticking straight out. I take such good care of that guitar and this is how it repays me? I haven’t even been packing for an hour and things already look bleak. This isn’t exactly the way I wanted to start off my final year of college.

I’ve always hated packing, but this time it was painful, literally. I am relieved that I am finally ready to leave, but something in the back of my head is still clawing at my mind, something that’s making me nervous, even scared. I open the heavy door to the diver’s seat of my sky blue 1993 Chrysler New Yorker and drop down and sink into the cushions. I look through my music collection to find a worthy CD for the trip, and come across an album by Something Corporate that my neighbor in the Russell Hall dorm gave me my freshman year, and slide it into the CD player. As I turn the key, the gas gauge moves from empty to half a tank. That’s enough to make it to school, but with how packed my car is, it will be cutting it close. Throwing my car in reverse, I wave to my parents who are standing at the front porch and pull out of my driveway as the tailpipe of my over-stuffed car scrapes the road.

I’m driving, but I feel like I’m not paying any attention to the road; I am paying full attention to my thoughts. My senior year of college… how did it come so quickly?! I take the last bend before the ramp to I-79 north and stop at the red light. As I watch the rush-hour traffic scream by, full of people who want nothing more then to get to where they’re going, I can’t help but think how I don’t want to go anywhere but where I am coming from. Green has always been my favorite color, but when the light turned green I felt violated by it, as though it was pushing and prodding me to do something against my own will, forcing me to continue with my journey.

I-79 rush-hour traffic is unforgiving. I want to merge onto the interstate, but the constant flow of traffic forces me to stop on the side of the three-lane road and wait for an opening. I don’t know what I have done to deserve what this day has brought me, but I would love to know so I can never do it again. I feel like I have been sitting here for an eternity when a trucker pulled into the left lane, cutting off some traffic, but clearing a space for me to merge onto the highway. I raise my hand to wave as my foot pushes the gas pedal to the floor. My car does its best to accelerate quickly, but with the combination of its full steel frame and the weight of all of my stuff, it accelerates about as fast as a turtle with a broken leg. The car behind me is forced to slow down before getting in the left lane and shooting past me.

I could drive I-79 in my sleep. After driving the same trip for almost five years, three for my own schooling and two for visiting my older brother while he was at Westminster, there are no more surprises to be found on the road. I stare at the sky and watch the clouds grow grey. It wasn’t supposed to rain according to the weather, but with the day I’ve been having it wouldn’t surprise me in the least if a hurricane was forming over my car. “This is it” I keep thinking. The thought is continuous and tormenting. What am I going to do after this? How am I going to pay off my loans? How am I going to find a job in this economy? The doubting questions are constantly coming as I crawl closer and closer to Westminster.

It’s mile 109 and my mind is overwhelmed; my head starts pounding, my breathing grows fast and shallow, and the desire to turn the car around and gun it for home is now nearly irresistible. Instead of giving into my intense wishes, I pull into the emergency lane and stop my car, get out and lean against the driver’s side door. My head is going ballistic. It’s the idea of being thrown head first into the real world, the grown-up world. I haven’t realized until now that I am in no way a grownup. I’ve never had to fully take care of myself. I don’t cook, or know the first thing about paying bills, I’ve never had a credit card; how the hell am I going to survive?

I glance up to find a line of cars speeding past five feet in front of me. The wind from the passing traffic is rushing past me, shaking my car as I lean on it. I am frightened by the idea of being hit by one of the speeding cars, but more so by what I realize when watching the cars go by. This is my life, and I may want it to stay the way it is, but it won’t stop for me. I can stop on the side of the road to delay my arrival at school, but ultimately I will get there, and graduate. It’s the same thing my throbbing toe was trying to teach me earlier; it may hurt, but you’re going to have to continue packing and keep moving. I may not be completely independent yet, but I have made it this far. So what am I scared of?

I force myself to open the door of my car and get in. I put the car in drive and pull back on the highway to complete the last 4 miles of my journey on I-79. “Konstantine” by Something Corporate fills the car, and I continue to drive to my destination, praying that graduation will not be the end of my grand adventures in life.

#-#-#