Cruel Mercy

William Yasinski

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William Arnold Yasinski

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Sharp fall day in Maine, keeping a cinematic pace on a two-lane through the excruciating beauty, I come up a rise to a farm, barn on the right, house left, and feel a thumpity triplet as gray-white flashes peripherally

and I know, somehow, it’s a cat. I stop and another stops behind, between us the convulsing body. We arrive at the victim knowing we have to end its misery, but there are no rocks. She looks at me, shames my hesitation—

“If you won’t, I will.” No time for thought. I grab its legs, to eliminate pain, and swing—not wholeheartedly enough—then again—full arc of cruel mercy, defining, for a moment, the limits of civilization.

We put the body in a box on the porch. I write an apology along with my details. We look long seconds at each other, say, “Thank you,” in unison, as if a sort of prayer, and leave what we can’t change.