CONTENTS

Vietnam Vet with Dog. Ya Know the Rest  4
Author Notes  6
Vietnam Vet with Dog, Ya Know the Rest

the homeless man’s sign says.
Today the bum with the German shepherd
has added something new to his panning station—
a gigantic yellow Easter bunny.

I don’t know the rest.

Scored during a dumpster dive,
the rabbit is his newest marketing ploy.
It is working.
Reeled in by the black button eyes,
grubby-faced children squeal.
Soccer moms look twice,
roll down their windows,
empty their change purses
into rough hands.
One rabbit eye pops out of its socket
and dangles from the black-yarned optic nerve.

For the first time,
I watch his statuesque dog
stand guard for his master,
and I imagine what the rest could be.

The rest of the day?
The rest of the war?
The rest of a lost story?
Picture this:
At dusk, the man smoothes
out fresh cardboard
creases it along the corrugation,
and styles a lean-to.
He folds shaggy blankets,
and fills a crumpled waxy cup
with water for the dog.
He holds the rabbit
—now a long-eared Cyclops—
that still smells like children’s shampoo.
He presses it to his face like a gas mask.
Author Notes

Claudine R. Moreau lives in Burlington, NC where she teaches physics and astronomy to anyone willing to learn, where she runs for her life from the terrors of suburbia, and defies gravity and fatigue in equal parts daily. Her poetry has appeared in Astropoetica, The Bitter Oleander, The GW Review, and Arsenic Lobster. She has work forthcoming in Neon Magazine.

About the Work

Reading poetry often sparks ideas for me. If I’m ever feeling dry, I go to some of my favorite poets for inspiration. My poem in Seque, “Vietnam Vet with Dog, Ya Know the Rest” came from reading Dorianne Laux’s poem “Little Magnolia” in her book Facts About the Moon. In Laux’s poem a homeless man sets up his home each night between a wall of a laundromat and a broken fence. I was immediately reminded of a homeless man that I used to see quite often when I lived in the Washington, DC area. I would see him while commuting home on the bus, standing by the light at the end of the I-395 exit ramp. This homeless man seemed different to me. He recognized that in panhandling in the mecca of panhandlers that he needed to stand out—and stand out he did! He owned a huge German shepherd dog and carried a handmade sign that read “Vietnam Vet with Dog, Ya Know the Rest.” The enormous yellow stuffed bunny rabbit may be a figment of my own imagination, but for some reason I think he might have had one during Easter season one year. I was always intrigued with this man, he stood in that same spot for all 6 years that I lived in the DC area. I started wondering where this guy went to each night? Did he have a spot like Laux’s homeless man? And more importantly, what did I know about “the rest.” What in the heck was the rest? I realized that I truly didn’t know the rest or really much about how many Vietnam Vets became homeless. I began reading a bit more about what these vets have gone through.

When I first start on a poem, I write it down by hand on paper in a journal. Usually the writing sprawls all over the page with arrows and insertions and side notes, and it doesn’t really look much like a poem at first. My next step, which might be right away or days or weeks later, is to take those notes/seeds of the poem and type them on the my laptop, and giving the file a title. What I find is that the real structure of the poem begins to reveal itself, and I begin adding to and whittling from the handwritten material. Once the poem is all in the computer, I will usually print it out and then begin a hand editing and critiquing process. This poem was workshopped last summer with poet John Lane at the Wildacres Writers Workshop in the blue ridge mountains of North Carolina. I’ve never asked questions in poems before and wanted to be sure that I didn’t go overboard with them, nor did I want the questions to really have such obvious answers. I wanted to explore that place that this man went to each night like Laux’s homeless man recognizing that this place was theirs, their sanctuary, their solace no matter how different than my own.

I once heard someone say that poets never lose that childlike curiosity for the world. I can relate to that! It’s why I am a poet.
Claudine R. Moreau on the Web

www.astropoetica.com/Spring10/cometgirl.html
www.astropoetica.com/Fall09/mythofaether.html
www.astropoetica.com/Fall09/tilt.html
www.oystersandchocolate.com/Poetry/1691/TheShave.aspx