

TAKE HEART

A Conversation in Poetry

*Edited & Introduced by Wesley McNair,
Maine Poet Laureate*

Few contemporary poets have used the device of the symbol more effectively than Waterville poet Peter Harris has in “The Net.” Peter writes that the poem “comes from a particular event in my childhood, an early encounter with racism and my complicity in it, growing up as I did in an overwhelmingly white community.”

The Net

by Peter Harris

I saw the black maid park the Cadillac
in the lot of the Indian Harbor Yacht Club.
When she hefted the first huge silver tray
of delicacies for that evening’s soiree
on her boss’ yacht, I offered to help.

No, she said, in her starched gray uniform
on orders from her employer. The launch man
in wrinkled khakis and a black cap with gold
braided on the bill, told her no, she couldn’t
ride the launch. Against Club rules.

But I am just bringing out the food, she said.
Everyone looked at the ground. The launch man
and the maid in their uniforms with strict orders,
me, at twelve, with my marlin spike and stopwatch,
still learning the lines, the tactics of yachting.

I’d never been so close to a black person.
I could see the whites of her eyes flash.
She was caught. He was caught. I
didn’t know that I’d been caught. I couldn’t
feel the hook that pinned my tongue to my cheek.

But stepping aboard the launch, I felt the net,
woven so carefully by so many hands,
the seamless, almost miraculously strong,
transparent canopy that would keep everyone
in Greenwich exquisitely and forever in place.

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