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Escape

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The Captain's Hat

By: Jerry Ryan

Mothballs, the perfume of old artifacts.
Damp and dusty basement smells.
Dirty basement windows. Opaque, lined mesh with wire.
Dust mites dance in angled yellow, shedding little light on a
stranger's dreams.

His secrets fade in an old, green footlocker.
Books he read. Clothes he wore.
Magic tricks with no instructions.
Medals. Ribbons. Awards.
The Captain's Hat.

The Captain's Hat is still too large, less so every year.
Olive green. Brown leather band.
Polished brass eagle. Cracked plastic liner.

Take it out.
Guide the stranger's crown to your curious head.
Tilt. Ape. Picture the photo on the mantle.
Try on this stranger's life.

What thoughts did he think?
What pain did he feel?
What did he sound like?

Imagine a hearty laugh.
How his rough beard felt.
How he smelled of cigarettes and after shave.
Imagine a hug.

Then remove the cold hat from your brow.
Pack it back away among khaki shirts, uniform jackets,
funeral flag.
Close the lid tightly.
Walk away slowly.
Turn out the light.
Close the basement door.