

Wilderness House Literary Review 14/1

Andrew Hubbard

Peace

Every old seaman's home
Has a barometer
Often the finest artifact in the house,
A lovely thing in sculpted teak,
Placed on the living room wall
Between the stiff photographs of grandparents.

The retired man, with his cane and his pipe
Consults it every few hours
And a sustained drop is a call to action:
Weather's coming—bring the chickens in,
Gas the car, close the shutters,
Fill the water jugs, double-bolt the doors
And get ready to see it out.

Really, he wants to reef the sails
And batten the hatches
But that won't work ashore
So he sits in the rocking chair
With his pipe in his mouth
And the white cat in his lap.

Years ago his wife would have scowled
Like a thunderhead, but she's long gone.

There are some changes.
Most notably, the wicker-wrapped jug
Of Barbados rum, fifty years old,
Sits on the counter boldly, not hidden
Under the sink, behind the cleaning stuff.

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He pours another double-shot
And rocks gently, while the cat
Digs her claws into his pants leg
And the new storm rocks
The tree-tops across the harbor.

He sips and says to the cat,
"You couldn't bottle this stuff,
It would destroy the soul."

The cat purrs louder
And squeezes her eyes shut.

The wind picks up
But the house is solid.

He smells the rum slowly
Without tasting it, and says
To the cat, "Finally:
This is peace."