



THE SEA CLIFF

BY NORBERT KOVACS

Norbert Kovacs lives and writes in Hartford, Connecticut. His stories have appeared or soon will appear in Westview, Foliate Oak, Squawk Back, Corvus Review, and No Extra Words.

I get the sense as I look into the distance that there must be something behind the cliff across the bay. Or perhaps through it. I am certain it is there in any case; the cliff leaves me no doubt. I sense it in the cliff's form, the black granite hulk looming over the sea at the bay's edge. It is a near square, its sides satisfyingly even, geometric as nature might allow. Long bulges flex along its face like bows set to shoot their arrows at an instant, the sun highlighting them in white streaks. Tufts of plants poke from the cliff's side where the granite cannot contain them; they are like secrets that failed to be kept. On the cliff top grows a field of spring grass, a light green hair to the thin soil. The sky arches overhead like a bright blue halo, full of light. The dark sea rolls to the left of the cliff and low, soft hills descend in a flock from its right. I suppose that I can discover what makes the cliff suggest the invisible presence I have imagined, the thing that hides behind its granite. I paddle my boat across the bay toward the place as the gulls call and circle overhead.

I draw near the cliff and find the water churning by its base next to the sea. Waves break on the gnarled, black rocks there and send freezing spray into my face. I look toward the cliff. The place seems much different now that I am close beside it. The rock appears not awe-inspiring, but excessive, overly big. The long bulges seem to have lost the tension I knew; they press outward in fat, lazy curves. The rock is not pure granite as I believed. Nobs of basalt and feldspar pockmark its front; mica glares from its flat places. I turn from the cliff to the inlets and coves at its side. Shadow darkens their entries; I cannot see into them. They offer a mystery, a promise of the unknown and hidden. However, it is not the promise that drew me to the nearly square, granite monolith. On my right, I mark the corner of the cliff by the sea. I imagine rounding the bend and discovering a scene of open, blue water stretching everywhere. I picture the sight lined by wonderful, broad horizons. Yet this would not fulfill my hope for the dark cliff: it would be different. I sense finally that I have failed in some way coming to the cliff side.

I make a circle with my boat and return toward the bay, my back to the rock. I think of the cliff falling farther behind my boat as I go. I imagine the great mass of bulging, hard stone that loomed above me. I remember the wild plants pressing in tufts from the rock near its grassy top. The images crowd my mind and I cannot set them aside. I turn to survey the cliff once more halfway across the bay. I am amazed. I find the scene as majestic as it had been when I first saw it. The cliff pronounces its satisfying square. The long bulges arc tensely. The sky hoops blue overhead. I believe again there is something behind the cliff or through it. The memory of my close encounter with the place does not make me any less confident. I find it strange that, with the distance and perspective, I can believe this all again. It must be that, look near or far, I perceive the place in some way that I do not understand fully. I wonder if it is right to say then I see anything extraordinary out there. I might not. However, I do not like to admit this and suggest that the truth may turn out next to nothing in the end.