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A Scholar's Vacation

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Kyle Norwood

A Scholar's Vacation

I spent a week last summer by the ocean
in a shared condo, with my son and wife,
her mother and relatives. My dissertation
was almost finished, five years of my life:
Poetry and the Cultural Discourses of Madness.
I was making “final” revisions, but they were endless.

Above the floodlit beach, we watched the endless
arrival of the waves in rows. The ocean
pounded all night; like Lear, I felt my madness
soothed by the din. I made love to my wife,
played card games with my son, as if my life
were simple, and no clamorous dissertation

could interrupt my ease. The dissertation
sat unrevised; its pages curled in the endless
spreading heat of summer days. That was the life ...
for a day or two. After that, the ocean
lost its allure; I fretted, let my wife
and son go to the beach without me. Madness

obsessed my mind; I wrote about Lear's madness,
trying to fill a gap in my dissertation.
Impatience got the better of my wife:
“I think you *want* this project to be endless.
I *asked* you not to bring it to the ocean.
When do you plan to get on with your life?”

I sulked and pondered. Were books more vital than life?
How many scholars have suffered over the madness
of the Gods, who let a library burn by the ocean?

Printed along one line, my dissertation
would stretch far out to sea, measuring the endless
distance between a scholar and his wife.

Mind you, I never blamed my son and wife
for the imperfections of my art and life.
I dreamed of wild-eyed scholars taking endless
promenades down the corridors of madness.
Their footsteps were the words of a dissertation
drawn in wet sand, to edify the ocean.

I should have listened to my wife. She knew it was madness
to seek the meaning of life in the depths of a dissertation,
now filed in an endless aisle of a library by the ocean.