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Photo by Dan McGavin



**DR. CHARLES FISHMAN**

## Raymond Martin

He was born and raised a Virginian, an old country boy who knew every notch and hollow, had fished every stream. Each bordered field in that sweet Southern land had taken up residence in his heart where there were no boundaries.



It was why he'd walked Virginia's  
rich cadastral map that took on  
more detail as the swift years passed.  
He knew each bluff and byway,  
each culvert and creek where the history  
of this nation changed, where change  
had been written in blood.

Virginia was his country, and he  
could name each tributary and tidewater  
village, every burial ground and Civil War  
campaign. Her rivers were poetry to him —  
the Mattaponi Rappahannock Chickahominy —  
and, if he could, he'd have rafted the sky  
over Richmond, Roanoke, Alexandria.  
He remembers fifty, sixty, years ago, the fine  
*hachures* of families, the hard good lives  
of friends, and his three dark years  
in the Great War that forever marred  
the world. He remembers, though he's  
getting old and the map has grown un-  
recognizable: each bypass, interchange,

strip mall alters history. Just ask Raymond.  
He once walked each county and, given time,  
could still name them. To live a century  
is a kind of vindication, and the names  
of the dead swim back: choruses of praise  
and devotion and a country boy's long dirge  
of grief. How deeply he's loved Virginia.

### Three Boys Cycling

I wish I could have thought of them  
as three boys cycling, but once their laughter  
wheeled closer, circling tall trees

at our property's rim, their dark faces  
were revealed, and I felt a wave surge over me  
like grief or fear. The boys were seeking help

in a strange country of neatly trimmed lawns  
and white skin and they, too, were on edge.  
Now that I could see them — how they held back  
a little and spoke to me, then looked away —





I could tell the brave laughter I'd heard  
was like a vine whose leaves had caught the light

and shined but whose roots had been singed.  
It was a long way home for them and I regretted  
my meager welcome, how I'd hesitated

to fetch the tools they needed. I knew then  
it was fear I felt and not yet grief. And I could see  
they sensed what I was thinking

and what held me, and I watched them waiting,  
hoping I could be trusted. I think they were smarter  
than me and more accustomed to being wounded,

that they knew before I did what was at stake.  
And surely the boys understood that fixing the tire  
wouldn't repair the situation.

Then the chore was done, the broken wheel  
once again turning, a fading laughter glinting,  
the golden autumn light falling.

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