



# THE MERCURY

THE STUDENT ART & LITERARY MAGAZINE OF GETTYSBURG COLLEGE

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Year 2008

Article 28

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1-1-2008

## Boys Will Be Boys

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Class of 2009

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Butcher, Amy E. (2015) "Boys Will Be Boys," *The Mercury*: Year 2008, Article 28.

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**Keywords**

creative writing, fiction

**Author Bio**

Amy Butcher is a junior at Gettysburg College. She is double-majoring in Creative Writing and English and recently completed a semester abroad in Aix-en-Provence, France. In addition to serving as co-production editor for the Mercury, Amy is a Gettysburgian staff writer and a tutor at the Writing Center. She enjoys traveling, cooking and her Jack Russell terrier. Upon graduating, Amy plans to continue her education and pursue writing at the graduate school level. She aspires to be a Creative Writing professor and freelance writer when she grows up.

## Boys Will Be Boys

As a child, I had always found a duty in clearing the backyard pool of bugs. It wasn't that I liked bugs, in fact I despised them, but something about lifting their almost lifeless bodies out of the water made me feel good inside, as if I had rescued a small kitten from a tree or found a donor for a patient in need of a heart. "Here you go," I'd say as I bumped the pool skimmer against the hot ashen cement that enclosed our pool. "I give to you another day."

It was almost as if these bugs had places to go, things to do. I felt noble and considerate as I watched their bodies trail a wet line across the cement before scattering their wings and lifting their upper bodies towards the sky. These bugs were going places, I told myself, they were the future pollinators of the local park or had big plans to migrate south by September. They'd turn up somewhere in Tampa, Florida and delight all of the tourists. They'd give birth to a small mosquito that would later bite my nemesis or inflict disease upon the neighbors' barking dog. They were *doing things*.

As much as I had wanted to believe that these organisms went on to live fruitful, productive lives, the reality of the matter proved that they were about as important as fruit flies and, as luck would have it, placed in the very same category.

It wasn't until I was about thirteen or fourteen that someone finally pointed out the insignificance of my actions.

"You stand here what, ten minutes a day?" My older brother, Wesley, asked once, bouncing a tennis ball against the ground in a loud, crude manner. "Know how many sandwiches you could make for the homeless in that much time?"

His point seemed insufficient as I knew I would only be able to make four, maybe five, sandwiches and there were no *real* homeless people in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, but still I considered my actions later that night. I lay in bed, my covers pulled back in a wretched mess underneath me, and contemplated the actual doings of these bugs. As much as I had wanted to believe that these organisms went on to live fruitful, productive lives, the reality of the matter proved that they were about as important as fruit flies and, as luck would have it, placed in the very same category. Was I really just wasting time?

The next morning, I wasted no time in gathering up the skimmer and tracing it along the surface of the pool, watching the small ripples gather stamina as they rolled across the water's edge. Today I would see where these bugs went, what they did, whether or not their returned to their husbands or wives and small children for a family movie and a bowl of popcorn.

The mission seemed easy enough, but upon scooping up half a dozen limp, waterlogged bugs, I began to realize the futility of the situation. Never before had I gotten so close to them, analyzed their tiny little faces and black, metallic-looking eyes. These insects looked more like little robots than anything else, their

bodies hard and solid, their wings and legs more like mechanic attachments than limbs. And, worst of all, they were all dead.

Finally, after scraping eight or nine bugs off the hot cement and into the arborvitae, I rescued a small firefly with flailing legs and flapping wings. He was still alive. Eagerly and excitedly I tapped the skimmer's net against the ground and watched the bug peel away softly, his black and white body catching on a small cattail that had dried in the sun. Bending down, I examined the bug and found humor in his arduous attempts to dry off and fly away. Clearly, he was going nowhere fast.

It was at about this time that Wesley came outside, his socks thrown on haphazardly and his heels resting uncomfortably on the top of his sneakers. Clearly, he had been watching me from the window in the kitchen and curiosity had gotten the best of him. His eyes squinted as he came closer, and he bent down to examine what rested on my leaf.

"Ridiculous," he said, shaking his head and squinting his forehead back into three or four tight, rolled lumps above his eyebrows. "I kill two dozen of these, easy, in a night."

He was, of course, referring to the luminous, plastic orange baseball bat he shared with our younger brother, William. On any given summer night, the two of them would sneak out through the garage, grab hold of the bat and whack at the night sky, smattering firefly debris across the bat like exploded water balloons. It was a forbidden action, and typically I was able to convince my mother to mediate, smiling as she ran into the yard, angry that they had disobeyed her. She'd break up their firefly massacre within minutes, but on a Friday or Saturday night, after she had enjoyed several glasses of wine and was resting on the porch, rocking with my father, I knew all bets were off.

"Just let them be," she'd coo softly, her voice soft and light and smelling of a peach wine cooler. "Boys will be boys."

"You're not getting this one," I said, suddenly hunching over the bug as if it were my very own newborn. I pictured the bug decorated with a small baby cap and little booties—four of them, one for each little femur. "Little Fire E. Fly," I murmured softly, smiling at my cleverness.

"Yeah, we'll see about that," he said in response, his hand reaching out to grab the soft leaf. He didn't get very close before I snapped at his hand, pushing it away from my new precious pet. Still, I knew there was a real threat in his words.

"See ya later, firefly," he said coolly, raising from the ground and walking away toward the garage. "We'll meet again soon."

For the remainder of the afternoon, I made it my personal undertaking to protect Mr. Fire E. Fly and, moreover, my dignity. This bug presented an opportunity to show my brother what I was made of, what sheer human passion could do in the face of adversity. Moreover, it was the next best thing to getting a guinea pig, something I had been hounding my mother over for the past three months.

"They stink," she had said, clinking some ice cubes into a clear plastic cup with teal and lime-green cartoon martini glasses around the base. "I mean, honestly. They're part of the rodent family."

Fire E. Fly came with me everywhere that day, and when I feared his life would be threatened—as it certainly would in any one part of the house if my mother discovered him—I dutifully camouflaged him in whatever seemed practical. An upside down baseball mitt for lumbering around the yard (I even held a ball in my hand to make it seem realistic), a pair of swimming goggles for whenever I wanted to take a dip, even a folded napkin when dinnertime came and my mother insisted we eat outside on the patio, citing the sun's rays for increasing her endorphins.

"It's God's own little happy hour," she exclaimed, setting down three china bowls filled with Spanish yellow rice, steamed asparagus and boneless chicken thighs. "Now, drink up."

After supper, I reached for Fire E. Fly and, as joyously as a young child would, attempted to skip off toward the driveway, where I would casually unearth my small pet and find another practical, discrete place for him to go, away from my brother's bat and the horrible glow of splattered bodily fluids.

"Not so fast, little lady," my father said, and I knew that instant that he'd have some drab, ineffective chore for me. The point of making his children work for their food seemed beyond me, as most of the time we only managed to create more of a mess that our mother, her kneecaps covered in the leftover food that we hadn't been able to 'slide' into the trash bin, would have to clean up. In fact, my father himself never lifted a finger, except to point it at one of us and remind us, "I work long days."

Holding the napkin tightly behind my back, I smiled at him politely and waited for his request. "Yes, father?" I said in a tone that openly mocked the Amy he'd like for me to be. It pleased him.

"Just clear the condiments and your plate, puh-lease," he said, smiling back at me. His mouth was about as wide as a baseball and a deep shade of ruby red from his wine. "Heidi," he said, glancing to my mother who sat beside him, "another drink?"

"Oh John," my mother said, dabbing her own napkin against her face. "We can't have *the child* fixing us another drink."

The way that they referred to me as 'the child' irked me, especially at fourteen years old, but I was beginning to worry about Fire E. Fly's oxygen levels while tucked tightly in the cloth and so, instead of questioning their diction, I merely smiled.

"Sure we can," he said, swatting at the air. "She's only got, what, seven years till she's fixing her own drinks? And you know what kids do the second they turn eighteen." He reclined in his chair and tucked his hands behind his head, looking off at the horizon and the fond memories it seemed to hold. "You remember our own college days. Fake IDs. Total ragers. You remember, *keggers*."

The fact that my parents had met in college was one thing, but their constant need to remind us all that it was a fraternity party they had met at—not an academic lecture or a food festival held by the Diversity Council—made all of us feel a bit awkward. There was nothing like imagining your own parents just years older than you, their clothing disheveled and splattered with alcohol.

"I don't mind," I said quickly, doing everything I possibly could to stop

my mind from imagining my father's pick up line or their first 'date.' I reached for the martini glass my mother had in front of her but she reached for it first, lifting it high above my head.

"It's not a big deal," she said, shaking her head at me. "I'll be in in a minute. I'll make myself one. I like to mix up the ratios anyway, if you know what I mean." She winked at my father and I reached for my plate, retreating to the kitchen with my napkin held securely in one hand in a manner that feigned casualness.

Once inside the house, I unfolded the napkin and carefully scraped Fire Fly off of the cloth with a spoon. Holding him up to eye-level, I examined him carefully and felt relieved to see his small antennas darting back and forth as he looked around his new surroundings heedlessly.

At the sound of my brother's loud, clunking footsteps, I carefully lowered the spoon and searched the kitchen for something quick and casual that I could place my small pet in. With my mother sharing flirtatious, reminiscent thoughts with my father, I knew there was no chance in hell I would be able to defend myself from Wesley if he came for my bug. That'd be it. Over. Done for. Lightning goop soup.

Quickly and professionally, I reached for a martini glass that sat in the kitchen sink and tapped the spoon against the rim, knocking Fire Fly into his new holding tank. *It looks so nonchalant*, I thought to myself, setting the glass against the countertop. *Like mom forgot her glass. How pragmatic.*

"I know you've got him somewhere," Wes said, moving closer to me. "And I'm gonna find him, wherever he is." With this he reached for a soiled knife that sat in the pan the chicken had cooked in. Pretending to slice it across his stomach, he cackled, "And then, stomach gore galore."

The rhyming amused me but not enough to give away my hiding place. I nodded at him confidently and retorted in a voice just high enough for him to hear, "Well, second you find him tucked away in his hiding place in the garage, he's yours."

Perfect. I had just dropped a wasted hint and he'd never think twice about my honesty. Wesley was so predictable like that.

"Oops," I said, covering my mouth and making the best frightened face I could. "I mean, in the *pool area*."

"Ah-ha!" Wes shouted, turning around and racing towards the garage. "He's mine now, that little bugger. And you still have to do *dishes*!" His footsteps pounded across the family room and tapered off as the garage door slammed shut.

Relieved, I smiled to myself and reached for my plate, carefully gliding the leftover rice into the trash bin without a worry for Fire Fly's safety. I could see him inside the dirty martini glass, creeping about cautiously, careful to avoid the wet splotches of sticky martini.

"You know," my mother said, closing the porch door behind her as she made her way into the kitchen, "you'll get along with your brother one day."

"Yeah," I said, rolling my eyes. "Some friend he'll make."

"Oh I mean it," she said, resting her plate in the sink. "He'll protect you from bullies, rescue you from bad boyfriends, who knows, maybe even supply you a



keg someday." Clearly, she was still reminiscing.

"Yeah, some hero. We'll see about that." I reached for my napkin and held it up to her, questioningly.

"The hamper," she replied, pointing to the hall. "Those things need a good washing."

I smiled at the truth in her statement. If only she knew what little organism had sat in that napkin in my lap for a good twenty-five minutes in the sweltering heat. Reaching the hamper, I tossed the dirty thing inside and replaced the lid overtop.

"I guess we'll just see," I said, making my way back to her, "I mean, I guess he's not *all* bad." My eyes scanned for Fire Fly but I couldn't see him, nor his holder, anywhere. I urgently made my way to the kitchen sink but found all the dishes had been loaded into the dishwasher. "There's still time, I mean," I stuttered, lifting the lever of the washer to find half a dozen pots and pans but still no martini glass. "We uh, we could become good friends?"

This last part seemed more like a question than a statement, but I couldn't even think of a way to rationalize my words. The fate of my very first pet was resting upon me, and I was determined not to lose him. What would become of his small, beady frame and his lustrous, luminous glow?

"Course you could," my mother said, pouring into her glass the remnants of the martini shaker and reaching for a fistful of ice cubes. Bringing the martini glass to her lips, her ruby red lips parted and she smiled, "And hey, boys will be boys."