When You’re Not Smarter Than a Fifth Grader
Janine Certo

But in the night
still comes
the unexplained figure
—Mary Oliver

My students once asked if they could learn about bats. They were outraged. There was a ring of men who killed for fun. Bat shoots, they said.

So we read, hammered bat houses, wrote reports. The Bat Guy from Game and Inland Fisheries came to give a talk. One night I was sitting outside a P.T.A. meeting, watching children put up posters they’d designed: colorings of ponds, woods, triangle ears and umbrella top wings, their letters scrawling:

*EAT 3,000 IN ONE NIGHT.* Promise roosts like a long, soft fur in the caves, preserving its marvelous dreams: the small moth, the mayfly, the lacewing.

But to the idiot who works against the intelligent shift in the air: watch what will vanish without notice of these schoolchildren, whose high-pitched sounds probe who’s listening. At least ten-year-olds care that the Virginia big-eared bat does not join the Caspian Tiger, Pyrenean Ibex, Yunnan Box Turtle, and the Dodo Bird.
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