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## Encounter with a Cowboy

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## **Encounter with a cowboy**

My sister shows me an  
e.e. Cummings poem:  
**buffalo bill's defunct—**

what can it mean?

Do you understand? she asks.  
I don't.

It means that no one is better than anyone else.  
It means that when we're dead, we're all the same.

All I know about poetry  
I know from Golden Books—

all I know about death  
I know from church, and  
from the time my mother  
furthered my education  
by bringing me to a funeral  
home to see a dead body.

The man in the casket had a green beard.  
I remember saying that it was green.  
I told my friends at school. I  
remember saying it again  
and again and again until  
I could no longer remember the beard,  
just my word for it—green.

That's what I know about death.

Now do you understand?  
We're all the same.  
Isn't that wonderful?

I ask, Why did the man in the poem shoot sparrows?  
She can't explain.

Everything I know  
about killing animals I learned  
the summer I went to Christian  
Heights Bible Camp in Little  
Valley, New York.

I was enamoured of a pond until  
a local came with  
a gun. A counsellor said later  
the man was deranged. The man didn't say  
anything himself, just  
shot all the frogs.

Poppity poppity pop.

I watched them die—  
misplaced stones in brown water,  
their lifeless promise as green  
as a beard.

Jesus I cried.

I ask my sister if defunct  
means deranged. I am afraid of  
what the poem means,  
afraid of being the same  
as buffalo bill,  
a defunct cowboy who shot sparrows,  
who is the same for being dead  
as a man who shot frogs.