

Confluence

“Shenandoah” . . .

“Potomac” . . .

Such native names are poetic
enough. No need to add the word “river.”

I watch them come together between granite cliffs,
flowing over and around boulders that once fell

into the streambed, or else emerge
as water grinds its way through centuries past.

At this moment the current is peaceful enough for rafters,
for paddlers of kayaks, also for the geese and herons.

I spy an eagle hovering above the portal
to the railroad tunnel on the North bank.

On this spot. in 1761 a ferry was established where Robert
Harper had already built his cabin. I do not doubt that you

will now recall why the town of "Harper's Ferry" is historic.
Today, visiting again after fifty years, I discover a footbridge

next to the railroad tracks, decide it must have been constructed
since the last time I stood waving to an engineer

as his freight train passed over this trestle.
I think too of the visitors' center which has since

appeared above the town, the new roadways,
the shuttle bus on which we traveled down.

Some things do change, I tell myself.

Walking half way to the Maryland shore I stand
on a perch—not as high as an eagle's perch

but high enough for me to see how the brownish water
from the north and greenish from the south flow

side-by-side, each keeping to its own half of the channel
for as far downstream as I am able to see. Then,

considering again the reason so many pilgrims travel here
(it is not just for the scenery), I visualize the clash

of two human rivers, of different colors, and how even today
each still flows on its own side of the channel—though we

are half a century downstream from my previous visit,
three times that from the moment when a raging torrent sucked

John Brown's band of freedom seekers into its flood. I walk
back, contemplating how both honeysuckle and poison ivy

grow in such profusion along these riverbanks.
Some things do not seem to change, I tell myself.

Some things do not seem to change.

Steve Bloom
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