

Oliver Rice

A PRIVACY

The sun gleaming on your umbrella,

forty million species, they say,
existing on Earth at this hour,
slithering, burrowing, infecting,
taking shorthand, upstream rapids, the bait,

the surf, the breezes soothing your spirit,

extant organisms being one percent of the billions
having once drawn oxygen from air or water,
passed from egg to mammal,
turned to marble at the bottom of the sea,

the gulls exhibiting their arts and crafts,

one tenth of one percent of the living tonight
destined for extinction by bedtime a year hence
from alighting on telephone wires, migrating,
stinging, nesting, severe existentiality.

CHEROKEE NATION

In the mountains, at their summer village,
before the Spaniards came,
the braves out patrolling their hunting grounds,
the maternal aunts arranging the courtships,
the sun and the rains blessing the gardens,
beans, squash, corn, sunflowers,

*their word for life
is said to have been
ga-no-du.*

The talk in the councils of their elders,
around the cooking fires and storage sheds,
more and more about the conflicts arising
with English settlers invading their lands
along the Georgia and Carolina frontiers
bearing ill will and strange diseases,
more and more about families migrating
fearfully into Tennessee and Arkansas,
about their leaders manipulated into ceding
more and more of their sacred territory
to ruthless state and federal authorities,

*their word for liberty
is said to have been
a-du-da-le-s-di.*

The dreaded edict received from Washington,
rounded up from scattered villages
by soldiers demanding their instant departure,
abandoning even absent family members,
crops, animals, furniture, clothing,
all possessions except what they could carry,
forbidden to sell anything to anyone,
assembled and detained at collection points
until the authorities had devised their controls,
herded westward on the Trail of Tears,

*their word for happiness
is said to have been
a-li-be-li-tsi-da-s-di.*