

# ONE LESS RIVER

BY TERRY BLACKHAWK

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*For Peter Markus*

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*Greet yourself  
In your thousand other forms  
As you mount the hidden tide and travel  
Home.*

—Hafiz

l.

# THE DOOR

Why is it lately closed to me?  
I will not complain. These grasses share the light.  
They bend and catch the wind gracefully.

The dance I missed, too shy, the other night—  
I wish I'd gone to the perfumery.  
A sauna's slats, so fragrant, wrap me now.  
I've crawled into a barrel on the hill.

# NAUSET

She walked toward the dunes, toward a house that she thought was in the dunes, but it had been gone years before she got to where it once had been. She had read about it, envying the naturalist his small light-filled room with sixteen windows in all directions and the weathered planks up on stilts over the dune, and she had imagined the wind rattling against the wooden shutters and thought about how it would be to run her hands across such shutters. She imagined they would be silky to the touch, smoothed for so many years by salt and spray and wind, and the many panes of the sixteen windows would be transparent to the world, giving views onto the tops of dunes where warblers dipped and surfaced from inside the vegetation, the beach roses and heather and other low-growing bushes that clung there. Below, there would be clumps of dune grass sweeping and making circles in the sand around them, and hermit crabs and other creatures without backbones inhabiting the burrows they excavated. The beach had stretched for miles and she had covered many of them, walking determinedly over the hard sand that had blown smooth but was still damp from the receding tide. Terns and sandpipers had flown up at her approach, standing at water's edge and facing out to sea single file and unmoving until she neared them and they flew up to settle again in the same formation a little ways down the shore,

reminding her of how once, on another beach, years before, a nesting mother tern had hovered over her head and dived toward her hat, the floppy green felt hat, which she wore all the time then and that she waved the bird off with since she had not seen its eggs in the sand at her feet. On that long ago dune, she had built herself a dwelling, with washed up planks and driftwood for walls and a tarp that she had carried in her backpack as a roof over her head and a sleeping bag on the ground. She had some hard bread and dried fruit for sustenance and enough water if she were careful with it, and her little dwelling nestled snugly down into the dune so that only the top of it caught the breezes. She could turn over in her sleeping bag and see the sun rising red over the water and swim naked later in the day in the waves and walk along the beach and make things for herself, weaving a shade for the western side of her dwelling out of grasses and fronds she collected in the scrub woods and bushes farther in from the shore. She read some poems and wrote and drew in her daybook by day and built a small fire at night, and time, except for a small plane that one

day buzzed quite low, was unbroken and calm. After several days of this, the wind and the grass and the waves began to sing to her so she waited for the next sunrise and then packed her backpack and dismantled the driftwood structure and took down the mat of woven grasses and headed off on the long walk down the island toward the outermost station where she could find a train that would take her back into the city.

# OVERHEARD AMONG THE ARTHROPODS

*And I said to myself: dwell in your shell.*  
—Moondog

## i. Hermit crabs

*Occasionally it is amusing*  
one of us announces antennae  
clicking claws  
barely touching the sand  
*to recognize ourselves without*  
*these shells*

*and think of the pulpy*  
*creatures who used to live*  
*inside*

## ii. Jellyfish

No shell necessary  
when one is gelatinous  
    carried by  
and through currents *cosí cosí*  
barely visible  
in the diffuse light

Beached now my shifting  
shape recalls  
bubbles blown through  
mucilage squeezed  
from a tube

strings sticky and shiny  
as these tentacles  
now dissolving  
into sand

### iii. Driftwood

One is attractive  
enough in  
    retrospect

Even washed up on shore  
genes determine the degree  
    of polish

Take these whorls whirls  
some resultant mix  
of experience and inclination

shadow and sheen

#### iv. Scarab

Would you like to come  
scrawl  
with me            we  
could be artists whose  
signatures get left behind

Desire takes such droll  
design think of antennae  
as bits of wing

## v. Submersibles

We bury ourselves  
above the line of the tide

feel the sole of your  
boot press back from  
our roof a quick  
water-logged medium

this

tensile suspension  
between one ground  
and another



# THE EXTINCT FRESH WATER MUSSELS OF THE DETROIT RIVER

*for Kathryne Lindberg (1951-2010)*

These are gone: *the deer-toe maple leaf, the fat  
mucket, the snuffbox, the rainbow shell.* Here, still,

the rusted manhole cover and the chipping paint,  
the lights and arches of the elegant bridge,

all coated no doubt then in ice. Here the breeze,  
here the freighters but not the car. Quiet as it's kept,

it's no secret the keys were left in the ignition.

Absence makes the fond heart wander, the mind  
meander, the river to swallow its flow—

the self-same river, the self-same self, even the one  
that knew better, the self that knew better

than to pick up a phony ten-dollar bill folded  
to disguise some evangelical come-hither.

Come hither, said the bridge.

*Little earwig mussel, pimpleback, northern riffle shell,*  
something lacy yet along the rim.

In the print gallery a dry-point fox in outline  
("Running Fox," R. Sintemi, Germany, 1944) floats  
as if on the surface of a river, water swelling upward  
on the verge of breaking up its lines—

Did you float, dear bat-out-of-hell, dear gnashing teeth—  
the pointed ears, the flowing tail outlined on water not water,