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Three poems

Madison P. Jones IV
University of Florida

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Losing the Dog

“Is you got the dog?” —The blues man

When he darts through the open door, into
retreating darkness after the yearling raccoon,
the one we'd seen the week before
on an evening walk, I am filled with regret,
remembering all those times he's done this,
how in ten years and three towns,
he must have disappeared a hundred times.
I go back to that morning I hung on the phone,
feeling the distance of my commute,
looking out at the abandoned factory town,
watching light begin off the fallen bricks
of those landscapes always ruined or reborn.
That same relief when you told me
he was home again. But down here the traffic's bad.
In an hour, the commuters will fill 8th Ave.
Picturing them, bleary and racing to work,
has me slamming the car door and rounding
the bend, breathless as mid-tour de stade.
The way his name hung like dirt in my throat
all that morning on the farm. The barbed-wire
fence we spent hours mending
after the neighbors called to say the cows
broke free and were loose on Highway 431.
He disappeared between the horseshoe nail
and the hammer song, like a rabbit shadow
in tall grass, ten feet away but camouflaged
and still as death, waiting for us to move on,
to forget him like a rifle report forgets
the bowl-resonant field. The times he broke out
and came to find me at the library across town
where I worked in the afternoons, crouching
in the bush for an open door to slip through
and surprise me at the front desk. Or when
he started sleeping on your front porch,
before we were married or had barely met.
Down the hill, as shortleaf sunlight
turns like a screw through the trees, to find him
waiting by the curb in expectation.

When the Owls Came

I blamed them
for my sleeplessness.

Wading in shallow
moonlight, I pleaded
for silence

to tuck me
in mindless wool.

When they left,
I understood the company
of nocturne.

January Nocturne

And out beyond the fence line,
the world is growing dark
as some painted window hung
in the trees above us, shuttering
around where we lie together,
turning our words in the low light,
remembering voices and faces,
the blood moon over the pasture,
tadpoles in the swollen spring,
shadows of conversation and firelight,
frozen mornings when the air seemed
to move straight through the walls
of our little cabin after the embers
in the woodstove had burned low.
What we can recall we never know
again, though we can remember
that pleasure moving through us,
empty as clouds in the night sky—
inching past at such a distance,
and nearby, how soon to disappear.

MADISON JONES is a graduate research fellow at the University of Florida, working on a doctorate focused on place writing and environmental rhetoric. *Reflections on the Dark Water*, his second poetry collection, was released in 2016 (Solomon & George). Recent poems have appeared in *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Shenandoah*, and elsewhere. He coedited *Writing the Environment in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Lexington, 2015). His articles have appeared or are forthcoming in *ISLE*, *Kairos*, and *Merwin Studies*, and he has reviewed for *Kenyon Review Online*, *The Journal*, and *storySouth*, among others. Visit his website: ecopoiesis.com.