

Masthead Logo

**The Iowa Review**

---

Volume 20  
Issue 2 *Spring-Summer*

Article 6

---

1990

# Useless Islands

Chase Twichell

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/iowareview>

Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Twichell, Chase. "Useless Islands." *The Iowa Review* 20.2 (1990): 14-16. Web.  
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.3870>

This Contents is brought to you for free and open access by Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Iowa Review by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact [lib-ir@uiowa.edu](mailto:lib-ir@uiowa.edu).

the bones asleep in the heat?  
A vine like honeysuckle scribbles  
over the wall, one sweet taste  
on the pale green tip of each stigma,  
the delicately splayed petals spilling  
pale orange dust and perfume.  
If I put my tongue to a single flower  
I'd suspend here forever  
in my unknown need,  
swaying like the black dog  
on his yellow bride, slightly off balance  
among the dead, locked in a dream.

#### USELESS ISLANDS

I'm trying to remember  
what happened when love overtook me,  
how the old self slipped  
from its hard boundaries  
like a ripe plum out of its skin.  
It's a personal mystery.  
It was August, each moment  
setting fire to the next,  
the woods already  
bloodied by the first bright deaths.  
I'm trying to remember, but there's  
a blacked-out part to the story,

a steep, crashing wall of seawater,  
a long thrill of fear. I was dragged

in an undertow as if out of sleep,  
and the blue-green light I swam toward

was this paradise of islands,  
these green days spilled

across a vast mercurial blue.  
We lie in a flood of white sand

under the broken prism of the sky,  
watching its fragile rays disappear

down the secretive avenues of palms.  
How long can we lie here?

The luminous charcoal and manila clouds  
cross like fish overhead.

His hand sleeps on my thigh.  
The ratcheted voices of the tree frogs

start up their random music,  
and we lie listening. It's a way

of passing more slowly through,  
of dragging a stick in the water

like a brake. There's the dull  
clop of goats on the red dirt road,

and the lisp of the sand beneath us.  
What the leaves were saying

back in the other life,  
the palms are saying here.

It's the words to the long slow sad  
familiar hymn about the hourglass.

I lie beside my love  
in the silence between two waves,

the grains of my body pouring.  
I know that the second wave will ripen

and fall. It will fall in a world  
that is emerald and sapphire,

lit by the sparks of the sea. A world  
that will darken and abandon me.

### WHY ALL GOOD MUSIC IS SAD

Before I knew that I would die,  
I lolled in the cool green twilight  
over the reef, the hot sun on my back,  
watching the iridescent schools  
flick and glide among stone flowers,  
and the lacy fans blow back and forth  
in the watery winds of the underworld.  
I saw the long, bright muscle of a fish  
writhing on a spear, spasm and flash,  
a music violent and gleaming,  
abandoned to its one desire.  
The white radiance of Perdido  
filtered down through the rocking gloom  
so that it was Perdido there too,  
in that strange, stroking, half-lit world.  
Before I knew that love  
would end my willful ignorance of death,  
I didn't think there was much  
left in me that was virgin, but there was.