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AN ELEGY: DEATH OF BLUE WATERS

Kate Nace Day

It was hot, now, dead hot summer
when the noon light turns thick and grey.
An old man is out in his boat, drifting in the key grounds west
of Key West,
the same bars he fished as a boy, sitting low in the stern,
turtle-backed – brown and marked and etched –
old palmetto hat and pink bandana, long pants stained with
sweat,
his bare feet tucked into the cool of his own shadow.

An old man with young eyes, he reads the sky –
Wind out of the southeast until the dead horse calm, then
weather clouds turning heavy and dark.
“Watch the sky,” he had taught the boy, “follow the water.”
But, the boy saw stories in the sky.
Clouds were white dinosaurs.
Winds were girls named Banana and Apple and Mary.

A cormorant breaks the surface off Woman Key.
He misses the boy. He wonders
if the boy got lonely
Living with dinosaurs in his head.

Don't be thinking on him,
feeling pity on yourself for you and you old body.
Left shoulder, useless, bony thing and a berry burr deep in
that hip.
Can't fish no more.
Knees stiff.
Lungs saying goodbye.

An old man with young eyes, he reads the water.
“The surface is everything,” he had told the boy,
“sprinkle shark's oil to smooth the surface.”
But the boy wanted the world.

And the old man alone watched the surface change.
Full of turtle grass and weed, slick streaks of gas and oils,
Blue, then green and brown. The Everglades, they said,
the ships.

He rubs his eyes. He rubs the side of his boat.
Like she is something he can hold in his hand.
Like a woman when you hold her belly and feel your heart.
The air falls cool. The rain is coming, strong and pearly-gray,
a shiny black wall of rain.

What world, he cries, would take the boy?
What world would let the blue waters die?