

River Talk
(fables of connections—lost)

by

Gary Bolick

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the author, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in reviews.

Publishers Note:

This is a work of fiction. All names, characters, places, and events are the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to real persons, places, or events is coincidental.

Solstice Publishing www.solsticepublishing.com

Gary Bolick © 2025

Most people are on the world, not in it—have no conscious sympathy or relationship to anything about them—undiffused, separate, and rigidly alone like marbles of polished stone, touching but separate.

John Muir

In fact, the whole of mythology could be taken as a sort of projection of the collective unconscious.

Carl Jung

Seven Brides for Seven Brothers (*Easter Sunday*)

Time was there was no time at all. Looking back and forth was neither here nor there. Rising up to stretch its cramping torso, a curious, bipedal creature looked straight up into the sun until it was too painful to continue; then looked, again.

Promising, right? Well, yes, to some.

Legend has it that a high roller, the biggest in Vegas, The Whale was betting the farm. He was going to break Sin City's largest house, on a long shot. Appearing like an apparition at the teller's cage of the Emmaus Casino, he snapped his fingers. Bingo! Like ghosts called up from the mist on the heath all his footmen, twelve in all, marched in with gleaming silver, hard-shell suitcases. A second snap of The Whale's fingers and his twelve footmen walked up, placed their suitcases on the counter of the casino bank, turned, nodded, and remained at attention.

So, my friend, picture this: twelve windows, twelve suitcases and not a sound to be heard—anywhere.

Complete silence on the casino floor. Some whispered,
"A miracle."

Why, you ask? Well, understand, all the talk was that The Whale was dead, that a rival Don had used a mole, knew the Whale loved to watch the sunset from a particular bench in the garden of his desert villa.

Sent his best blade Dis to have a chat. A meet and greet with the finer points to be gone over, if you understand me, if Dis felt The Whale wasn't amenable to the new order. Dis was to convince The Whale that the light, the weather, whatever you choose was no longer worth the trouble here. Understand? Saw Dis myself, smiling, using a fileting knife to file his fingernails down to a fine point. Before I could ask him how it went, he just winked—done. No more Whale. Word spread like wildfire.

Imagine then, when all of Sin City's highest rollers saw The Whale stroll into the casino, his footmen following like a lucid dream made real. Yes, sir. Big as life, seemingly back from the dead, smiling and self assured, a white carnation in his lapel, a shiny, black homburg on his head.

Raising his right index finger to the heavens, The Whale gave the signal. The Rockettes had nothing on these guys. Each suitcase lid popped open in perfect unison revealing freshly minted, ribbon tied bundles of double-sawbucks, stacked and packed, five-layers-deep. Heaven? Brother, if that ain't, I don't know what is. The Whale smirked, removed his shades, and then oh-so-slowly leaned in to breathe-in the scent of his carnation. I swear on my mother's grave chief, in that place, in that moment, if you had a dropped a pin, it would 'a sounded like an anvil crashing.

The Whale? Still as cool as the other side of the pillow. Never looked up, just whispered, "The bundle, all of it on my pony of choice: Emerging Man, in the sixth, to win."

More silence? No, a vacuum, and fear—lots of righteous fear. Yes, sir, the folding, primordial kind of angst; that gnarly, stick-in-your-gut-deep-down uncomfortable-type of fear that is the closest thing we have that can be called instinctual.

You follow? When a man can't help but *flinch*, he's got no control. Just wilts and shatters, from the inside out. Might even moan, 'cause his sixth sense tells him, *It's comin'!* Yes, sir, all of us know it. Seen it one too many times: old man's drunk and reaching for the strap. Yes, sir: *that fear*.

Then, blessedly, out from behind the tellers' cages, there was a stirring, and the sound of someone sighing, then clearing his throat. After another long, uncomfortable pause that had pretty much paralyzed all who lived and breathed, blessedly there came relief. Filling the air was a swarm of stuttering clicks and rattles, then the whizzing and whirl of tumblers being deftly dialed in, all ending in clank and moan of the safe door being unlocked and opened.

More silence. Then that same mysterious voice cleared itself clean into a chuckle, followed by some mumbling. A moment later all those random sounds combined to form a small man with a receding hairline, thick, black, horn-rimmed glasses, porting a slight paunch. Him?

Owens, ah, well, no, not just this place, *Everything*, the man whispers to me. Name? Man shrugs, and whispers, "Beats me," as we watch him walk slowly out of the casino bank, his eyes raised skyward as he checks and rechecks the numbers in his head. Coming to a stop, he, well, okay, you're right—a name, everybody and everything's got to have a name. So? Best I can get is, sure, okay how about: Bigfoot. Anything we don't understand, but scares the shortbread out of us, works.

So, yeah, as Bigfoot walks across the floor, his patent-leather shoes start to gleam. Yes, I meant it that way—gleaming so bright the crowd was mesmerized. Hell, his feet weren't touching the floor; least it seemed that way the light was so bright.

Then as Bigfoot keeps walking and ciphering, he pauses to drop his head, close his eyes, and begins silently mouthing what the guy next to me swears was a prayer. But wait, the dude next to him is absolutely sure that it is a sign.

A sign of what, I asked? But before that guy could say a word, another man shook his head and whispers, "Math, boys, he's doing the math!" Go figure, right?

So, we're all still waiting and watching as The Whale stands there smirking and Bigfoot is still running the numbers in his head. Now, we all figure The Whale's got him. Must really be a sure thing, a real stud of a horse, and Bigfoot knows it and is stalling, 'cause he knows standing there is the new boss, a new day, a new order, and it's all happening right in front of us.

All of us, every blessed-one-of-us standing there, we knew nothing was ever going to be the same for anyone in this town or anywhere, cause these two, Bigfoot and The Whale, got more money and muscle and pull than, hell, the universe, I tell you. Yes, sir, it was something.

Then, Bigfoot finally stops with his calculating, opens his eyes, smiles, and walks right up to The Whale, offers his hand, and asks, "Care to double it?"

Place exploded, became a mad house as every

last one of those high rollers bolted straight for the nearest open window and began emptying their pockets.

Boy-howdy!

So, now who you gonna believe? Bet *with* Bigfoot 'cause he's the *man*? Never seen *him* lose. Or do you follow the hunch, ride The Whale and his longshot?

And I...what's that? Oh yeah...the race and that horse:

Emerging Man.

A real thing of beauty, sound, spectacle and...revelatory. Nothing like the sound of thoroughbreds, twelve of them coming down the homestretch. Earth shakes, the air is almost corporeal as the sound of their hooves punch the air through you. Throw in all that mashed and thrashing turf, it was a sight and a sound and downright glorious.

The Whale's horse: Emerging Man?

Not so good. Coming into the first turn, pulled up lame—bad. Real bad, right there on the track, in front of everyone—had to put him down.

Toys of Distracted Gods

Marchon Baptiste rolled over from a hard, dreamless sleep, facing the covered opening of his lean-to. Reaching up, with a quick, deft back-handed swipe, he hoisted the canvas tarp away from the opening of his home. The oil-stained tarp, scavenged from a deserted oil rig, came to rest on dewed grass that formed the outline and collar of his home.

Yes, home: a rectangular hole ten feet across, five feet high and eight feet deep bored straight into a small bluff overlooking the river. Snug and cozy, but most important of all, hidden from the haunting and destructive touch of man.

'A blissful draw,' Marchon mused as he looked out into the darkness, a place that afforded him refuge from, 'The rage in between my ears. Apparently, no different than a blast furnace.'

A blast furnace, Marchon's lone, fond memory of school. Just a week before he was asked to leave, and never return, a substitute teacher, a wandering Ph.D., Darvin Chase, appeared before the class. Tall, angular face, sporting a pony-tail and an exaggerated limp that...

"That? Happened while I was doing research, and a little fishing off the coast of Alaska. An errant boom snapped the femur. Sings and rings like a bell when it rains," he said as he looked out of the window and nodded at the approaching thunderstorm.

Tasked with keeping the third-grade class busy until twelve, Darvin picked out two of his favorite Three Stooges comedies, and a third film he found hiding on the bottom shelf, in the back corner of the audio-visual annex. A small building, separate from the school, it offered the perfect place to finish off the rest of his medicinal weed.

Smiling blissfully, and for the moment pain free, Darvin showed 'Disorder in the Court,' 'A Plumbing we will go,' and 'Industry on Parade: "The Iron City" Pittsburgh, PA.'

Marchon slept through the two Three Stooges movies, but was riveted by the industrial film. Gleaming white-hot molten steel cascading down into girder and cross-beam molds. Armies of men wearing cumbersome suits, gloves, and aluminized hoods moving in and around the massive furnaces, took Marchon deep down inside of his own, isolated world. Suddenly, spooling out in front of him was a movie mirroring how he navigated through his own popping and sparking world of odd words, language, and shouting.

Still, with all the sparking and splattering of thousand-degree hot molten steel, what focused Marchon's attention to a fine point was the segment showing the door to a cooled down blast furnace opened.

Inside was revealed what the happy-go-lucky narrator described as the piglets.

"Affectionately termed pig iron! See them? All the little ones, just like piglets, packed in tightly, nuzzled up next to mama! Or as the workers like to call the furnace, the sow. Oh, my! Now wouldn't that make for some interesting barnyard chatter and fun and, hey, what about breakfast? Sooeey, anyone? You bet ya!"

'My head,' the eight-year-old Marchon mused, 'that's the inside of my head. 'Cept those stuck pieces of iron that man called piglets, and the big furnace he called a sow, don't even cover the half of it. No way! Let's see *him* try wading straight *in* and then *through* it. Wouldn't sound so happy, if *he was the one* had to bust back all those crawling voices, pops, and crackles that just keep creeping and scratching down in and then through my ears. It's all I can do to bust 'um back, stack 'um up, and try to connect 'um. Can usually get 'bout half there, half back to where I think they want me to be.

'Least ways, *there*, I can make out a little of what they mean, scratch the surface of what other people are saying. Not at all like here, though. Here, alone in the delta, it's peaceful and musical—connected.

'The screech of a hawk, the hoot of an owl, the murmur of water, they all run in, and through me, then fill me up 'til I'm sated. People and their sounds? Grating and ensnaring, those sounds just tie up my head like I got a fever.

'And just like that steel plant, it's me what's stuck in the center—me. When the city and the people go to scratching and calling, snorting and screaming, it's like that waterfall of liquid hot steel coming down on and through me. It's all I can do to breathe, then try and pick my way out. Just keep pushing and pulling until there's somebody left, that is or possibly could be me. 'Has always been intolerable worse in the cities. Too damned many voices; words hittin' me like sleeting rain. So? Yeah, so when I go to moving through the force and motion of all that gnarly noise, it's like wading through a river filled with invisible nets. Harder I swim, more I try to decipher my way up to the surface? Suffocating is what it is. Makes me desperate for air, shit! And once I'm up and out and finally catch a glimpse of me, feels like I'm covered in hot-steaming fire ants.'

Marchon laughed out loud at the memory, thinking, 'Back then, when I was a kid, I thought I was possessed. Thought Legba had cast a spell on me. All those sparks, feathering flames licking the inside of my eyes, crawling up the walls of my head. Damn, why wouldn't I think my skull's a forge; fighting and fussing with language, *their language*.

'Sometimes it takes a week to unload it—me. Snap off the pieces one-by-one. All of 'uv 'um burning like the sun, all stuck up and scattered everywhere in the attic of my head. All like bars of vibrating fever—*their words*, sticking and burning—*their chatter!*

'Damn it! It's *their confusion*, not mine! It's their racket bouncing around, it's *their white noise* screeching, damn it, not mine! Worms its way down inside of *my* head, *my* dreams, and *they say*: I'm the asshole?

'So, sure, where else a man gonna find some peace, but here? Only place that takes me in as *me*, leaves me alone to try and cipher out a version of, well yeah, Marchon. That fool there in the lean-to, the stranger to all the other creatures, here and in the city. Me, yes, I'm the fool who never ever will fit in, anywhere 'cept here. Guess that makes me a long-short moment, like a big cat that just never gives up the chase, never believes that's it's just the end of his own tail. From my first day in grade one to just about, well yeah, now,' he thought staring into the blackness.

The instant he walked into Dame Beautron's firstgrade classroom, Marchon *felt* more than heard the strange, haunting tones of the other children's voices, scratching and clawing at his ears. A week later, talking to his grandparents, the Dame described Marchon's dilemma.

"A special little boy who is, and please don't be offended, is a creature, and I mean that as a very special example of our race, Man, that is outside of language.

"What I will attempt to, and will ultimately fail at describing is at its root the failure of our language. Yes, what we believe connects us in the most intimate fashion in our language is the block, the impediment to being able to understand Marchon's astounding gift.

"We who operate so freely and easily within the limited confines of our language, are at a complete loss when confronted with Marchon's perfect connection to, well, everything."

Dame Beautron stopped speaking, closed her eyes and took in a long slow breath. After a long moment, she shook her head, smiled, and reached over and grabbed both grandparents' hands, saying, "So, I must admit it. I'm lost. Completely without guidance. Marchon is so unlike the others; there is no real point of reference. So, the best we can do is to write our own rules for the moment. When there is no precedent, we improvise.

"It appears that we have in Marchon a unique child, a boy stumbling between two worlds, living and experiencing a life like no one else around him. Lost *here*, as one of *us*, but perfectly connected to the world and the universe as a whole."

Dame Beautron stopped again, fighting off tears. Her face was turning pale as she bit her lower lip, and then whispered, "So very alone, and at such a young age. I..."

She stood up and walked to the window and stared out into the woods surrounding the small school. Without turning back to face Marchon's grandparents she continued to speak.

"I am beginning to question so much now after spending time with Marchon. I'm not sure what exactly *it* is, what all the rest of us are going after, chasing. Just a few minutes with Marchon, and I was unmade. Suddenly, *I'm lost and questioning myself, the very idea of—me*. How I communicate, what I feel, where I fit in, my lack of connection and understanding of, well, yes, how I fit into all of, well this!

"From the little time I have spent with him, I am beginning to see that he is wrestling with *our world*. He seems profoundly at ease and connected to his natural surroundings. That's what I was driving at earlier. It is us—we are the ones more lost than he. We live in a particularly small and closed sort of vacuum and yet we call him strange.

"Marchon appears to have no impediments or filters and, well, no that's not right, either, sorry. I know I sound the fool. Okay, yes, please indulge me. Slowly, now. Little Marchon, the dear, he possesses extremely elevated and heightened senses. And with these heightened effects, it, or I should say he is able to open up even more paths or conduits. It appears to be a beautiful form of triangulation. As each of the unfettered senses feed him more and more information, his connection becomes more profound and grows stronger. It's like an ongoing silent conversation between himself, the planet, and dare I say the greater universe."

Dame Beautron stopped, but still stared out of the window into the woods and began to curse quietly. After a moment, she apologized and returned to sit down and face Marchon's grandparents.

"Sorry, that was not very good, either. I'm simply and completely lost. I feel like an archeologist who's just stumbled upon the Grail. Yes, okay, that's better, I guess. Anyway, it's closer to what I'm driving at. If he could or can be helped, Marchon will be able to step through the looking glass, so to speak, no longer separated but an intricate, working part of a great whole. I know, sorry, that sounds like a fantasy. Sorry, not very helpful, I know. Let me try this, again.

"It's as though Marchon walks through a world that the rest of us can only look upon. When you and I pause our walk through the woods to stand on a rock that, say, overlooks a small lagoon and waterfall, are you following me? Good. Okay, you and I may take note of the light, the sound, see a creature or two and feel content that it is such a soothing place to stop. It is as though you and I live *on* that scene, glide on and over that world. Marchon? *Mon dieu!* He is so very close to actually navigating in and through it as an actual participant.

"I ran a few tests that I learned about in graduate school. It tests the effects of sound, light, and the environment on the individual. It comes from a study of the Amazon rainforests and how the creatures who live, basically, in the light and the others deep in the densest part of the forest, react to stimuli. I put Marchon in a room fully lit with his eyes and ears covered, and played a recording. Then took the eye and ear coverings off, turned off the lights and played the same recording.

"When I asked him to describe both scenarios, he was almost in a trance. When his eyes and ears were covered with the light on, he described sound as a tactile experience. With his eyes and ears uncovered, but in darkness, the music played became a physical part of the environment.

"Beethoven's 6th, the Pastoral symphony was the piece I played for him. He told me that it was a whisper from an echo that cycles up and through and then around the earth. That music never stops. Once played it's carried from creature to creature and then filtered back into the air down into the earth and returns newly minted and refashioned, but still music. No, he didn't use those words exactly, but that was the gist of it. I thought I was listening to a theoretical physicist or perhaps eavesdropping on the inside of Beethoven's interior voice. Sorry. There I go again. I told you we're writing our own rules with Marchon.

"Even his voice, after the experiment, it was different. Strong and assured, happy. Yes, he was home. Somehow, he is able to use his senses in varied and different ways. Take one away and the others more than take over. It is as though he is a conductor of a symphony, able to direct and channel. When he is free to use all of them, he is limitless, a bird on an updraft, floating. Speaking of eavesdropping again, I felt for a brief moment that I was a part of or had been dropped down into the center of his dream.

"Marchon is really very detached from all of us, but, and this is the vexing part, seems not yet capable of crossing completely into, and that's what is so frustrating, into what? You and I are lost, incapable of even imagining where he is or what he is experiencing.

“The closest example I have, and it only begins to touch on Marchon's particular dilemma, was a study I read in graduate school about a group of natives, the Yanomani, in the Amazon rainforests. We, modern man, stumbled onto them looking for gold. These people had no clue as to what modern civilization or our way of life entailed. In these first encounters, the lead anthropologist spoke of their complete and wholly undivided acceptance of time, light, sound, and meaning as a single conception or entity.

"Their language was accomplished with motion, touch and a sort of clicking with their tongues. In that first encounter, they were compared to man before he was modern, barely a step separated from the cave painters.

"Funny and sad, though, the more they, these innocents, were studied and approached by us, the more they lost, ah, I guess you would say, *their magic*. Yes, that was why I called Marchon a creature earlier. Just as the Yanomani when they were first discovered, he bears both a gift and a curse. Marchon, like the first Yanomani, discovered, they..."

Dame Beautron stopped mid-sentence and stared at the floor for a long moment. Then without looking up, she said, "The arrogance of us! Nothing is real or verified or authentic until one of the civilized claims it for their own. I..."

She paused, a second time and walked back to the window and opened it. Taking a long moment, she began to take in long, slow breaths and calm herself. After several more cleansing breaths, she whispered, "*Bon. Allez-y!*" and walked to the door and told Marchon it was okay now to come and sit with his grandparents.

Marchon closed the door behind him and sat between his grandparents. Staring at the floor, Marchon felt the weight of Dame Beautron's eyes come to rest on the crown of his head. For a moment it felt like a gentle, warm compress. Immediately after, her attention sprouted roots, training down and through until it reached the center of his head.

He was with her now, beside his favorite pool deep in the woods. Marchon turned up to looked up into the Dame's eyes and smiled. She smiled at him and nodded. Without speaking he turned his head slightly, then raised his eyes up, peering slightly to the left towards the window. Dame Beautron's expression changed. She felt a warm, then cool, rush of...

'Yes,' she thought, 'early spring. Even the smell of the water, the fresh, new green shoots of the grass, flowers. I, my God—Marchon is speaking to me.'

Dame Beautron leaned over and held Marchon's face in her hands, then kissed his forehead. "Yes, little Marchon is as clear as unfiltered, spring water. When *he* peers down into the water, it would seem that he does not see a barrier; nothing is really buried beyond his reach. Like a silent conversation between himself and the water and, dare I say, the entire world and most probably the universe as a completed whole. Quite a young man you have here. Yes, when he looks down into a clear pool of water, our wondrous little Marchon sees what lies beneath the water and everything overhead and around him working in concert. "As I said, but it bears repeating, I tested him both blindfolded and sighted. No difference, that is for now. What he cannot see, he simply uses the other senses to make up the difference. *Mon dieu!* What *ce petite*, sorry, this little man Marchon, what he holds inside of himself, I...impossible to imagine!

We, the rest of us, are, I am afraid to say, but it is true, we are oblivious to his talent. We have a sort of opaque filter that we insist on using to feed our egos and establish a separate place that we guard and call our own, that we insist is us. And worse, we insist that our wondrous little boy here must wear the same filter or suffer for it.

"So, it is a struggle. Marchon has to push against and then try to pull himself up from these two warring worlds. Stepping out from one but being stopped, chained down and prevented from completely entering into the other, well, that's just..."

Dame Beautron stopped short, then pulled Marchon up to sit in her lap. She kissed his forehead, again, then cradled his face between her hands a second time and looked straight into his eyes.

"Just there. Like a star going nova, there, just behind those wondrous emerald eyes—there, a portal, *mon dieu!* If I only knew how to follow. It's us, we're more than just the barrier. We're the deaf and dumb ones calling ourselves the elders and teachers. We defend the fraction of what we sense of this world and then proceed to teach it as truth and anoint it as real."

Marchon chuckled remembering that day. 'So, the child, and now the man. Never could get used to their odd, awkward sounds. It's only by the river, s'where the music sleeps. Just being close, walking along the river, I'm calm. Go deeper in the woods, especially in the delta, it feels like disappearing into a soothing chant, more echo than real, just out of reach, I swear it's there. I'm sure of it, yes, there is a separate world that surrounds us—alive and singing. Trick is, how to get in?'

Trying to contort into *their* particular pattern, squeezing into their suit of actions and words. Dressed to, yes, suit their needs and expectations of what, 'I was supposed to be,' he thought.

'Since I can remember anything, I was always looking out past the entry point of my eyes, watching *me* as I tried to suit up and act as how they believed I should. Me? No, never felt connected to that one—*me*— either. That one? No one, not even me really has a good handle on it. Still, I do know how strange it makes everyone feel about themselves. So, yeah, that's definitely gonna make them hate me.

'Funny how awkward, alone and hateful they become when they can't make me fit into their vision, pass me around like a hot potato. Last one in the room? Kicks me out. Me? Always a problem.'

First official shot across Marchon's bow was third grade. As Dame Beautron had unfortunately foretold, it was a learned official who ruled to solve the problem and act in the best interest of the herd, yes, it was, "What's best for the children. Mule-kicked, this one. Crazy-headed and, well, sorry, yes, *he* is! That's my final decision. Marchon is forbidden to set foot, again, in my school. Makes the other children uncontrollable, jumpy, but most of all, scared. Poor little darling, Sally; cute and adorable, and now that perfect little child cries, uncontrollably! Weeps, hysterically as soon as *he* walks in and sits down next to her," the principal told Mere Baptiste, Marchon's grandmother.

‘Best for the children,’ Marchon mused, as he remembered, later that same day, staring into his favorite pool, the ripples fluttering across its face, reassuring him wistfully.

“*So, the fool in charge proclaims, ‘Better to prevent the children from peering into the heavens than trying to explain how the brilliant fire of a long dead star burns on.’*”

‘Still, it *did* hurt. Still does, now.’

"*Tiens, mon pauvre*, my poor child, come here, let grandmamma hold you, no tears, please. It'll only make me weep even harder than you. We'll manage, Pere, your grandpapa will have something for you."

Etienne Baptiste smiled as he looked up from a cougar carcass, deftly separating the silver-gold fur from the flesh, shouting to his grandson to come closer.

"Mere tells me that those bastards have pushed you out. Good! The devil to them. This water and these swamps, what I call my blessed entanglements are full of the fowl, gators, and woolen creatures. Best teachers in the world. All will teach you, *mon dieu*, much, much more of how the world was and is and will continue to be made. Look at it this way, my boy! Now you are free to roam it, learn it, and become a part of it.

"Scary? You bet! Fear is the best teacher. Slows your actions, makes you think. Yes, look at this wondrous teacher! All twisted, and so dense sometimes you can't see a foot in front or to your left or right. And secretive like a good dream. Aromatic like a beautiful lady. And like the same lady, frightening. But this woman never disappoints, completely open, wondrous, always giving.

“An aromatic maze of water and weeds, trees and swamp, creatures vicious and sweet all turned and trundled up, here. A puzzle impossible to solve, but shows just enough leg to keep you anxious and interested, and all laid out for a soul to wade in and wander about.

"So, now you join us. Yes, all of us will now be a part of it, just like your father and mother, Mere and me, and now you. *Pourquoi pas?* And tell you what, my little sprite. Let's throw in a few stars for dessert, all of it and more are mixed and entangled here. Never in a thousand years will I ever tap even a fraction of its sound and beauty. You'll see, it makes each and every day a wonderment!

"Every moment of every day, she is like the universe spreading out and running endlessly outward, never stops expanding. You never stop seeing and experiencing something new. Her sounds and smells, light and touch, hold you, caress you, and then she becomes a part of you, rushing and washing through like a cleansing spring rain.

"Yes, *mon petit!* Who needs that dank, stinking clapboard schoolhouse? It cannot even begin to touch, to show you all of this blissful dancing!"

Gathering Marchon up in his arms, Pere threw his prize up in the air, laughing as he caught the small child in his arms and hugged him, exclaiming, "Truth be told, yes! I've been expecting you! I've seen how you wrestle inside of your own skin. All good now, *mon petit, c'est bon!* No, better than good, it's like riding a beam of light up to the stars and back. You'll see! You and I, the two of us, we'll stand on one of Saturn's wondrous bans and look back down and laugh at all of this, and those bastards!

"The principal? No different from all the other men, the lot of them robbers and plunderers, blood suckers. Who needs them? We'll go to *this* school where the wind and the water, the sun and stars, the growl of a cougar, the screech of a hawk, but most of all where the river talks. You'll learn her language, *mon petit*. Yes, my little one, you will see why those bastards back at the schoolhouse wrestle with their heads and scream up to gods they know will never answer.

"Yes, they all wrestle and never celebrate the only gift of any value—their lives. Yes, those silly, stupid bastards ignore, cajole, and complain about the one wondrous and inexplicable gift this jester of a universe has given him—a life! Perfect and elastic, this odd gift the universe has bestowed on them opens up to any and everything you can imagine, yet, all they can do is complain! Go figure! Come, let the old man show you how all these entangled and twisting waterways, the swamp and delta and all its wondrous creatures can school you.

"It's like my old man, my father told me, it's a trick, a joke. Legba and the Lord after wrestling out in the garden, grew bored and distracted. It was Legba who first started dropping them, one after another, odd, tiny figurines and stick-like creatures, that would be us— Man— down a well.

"One after another, curious, the big fella himself, watched and joined Legba, dropping his own designs down, one imaginary little creature after another. Both chuckled and smiled as they watched and waited to see which one might bob up to the surface, float and then swim. One god to another, matching pennies, laughing and joking as they tried to pull a little magic out their asses, just waiting and watching to see which diversion would float.

"My brave, little one, Marchon, we're just the toys of distracted gods. Never really worked out all that well. Hey, but no worries! The best joke of all—we still got a taste of life. Some call it a sentence, hard labor, some call it solitary confinement. Me? Call it what you like. I just walk the prison yard, laugh and smile, and then occasionally flip a bird skyward, raise my middle finger to the heavens, yes sir, just to annoy them." Marchon looked once more into the lightless air. Black, but singing now. Stirring and percolating with delta wildlife. His brain idled, in tune with the waking chatter—a symphony stirring to life. 'So,' Marchon thought, 'other than Dame Beautron, Mere and Pere...who?'

Still, it was, really, no longer a question. He knew. He tried to ignore the obvious, haunting images that had begun to tease and taunt him, but could not. Deeper and denser, progressively becoming more lucid with each passing day, were the memories of the Indian scouting party that, a little more than six months ago, saved him. Their faces were becoming an active part of both his waking and dreaming life.

'Still not sure what to make of them; the elderly man was more mystic than human. It was like his skin was stone, barely softened, forming, no, more like harnessing an outline of an idea or feeling. He was so old and comforting. His face and eyes were barely able to confine what burned inside of him, like there was a ball of light burning and trapped inside of him. The others? The other older one was quiet, reverential. And the young one? Yeah, like a young bull, hard, chiseled face, but shining, like a new bronze statue.

'I was gone, at best an hour from being dead when they appeared. The woods, the water, the light all beginning to pack up and move on. I wasn't scared, just disappointed. I knew there was more, and I never would have the chance to cross over and connect, sink to the bottom of the river and look up through the water and see and feel and touch the universe as simply one more long note played. But I knew that I was close to the unfettered connection and well, I could tell myself at least that was...*something*.

'Funny, as the memories keep returning and cycling through me, I swear, they, yes it seems that the woods actually wept for me. I could sense it. Grows stronger each day. Feels like something out of a dream that just keeps building, adding details.

'Anglos, yes, Anglos that was the name the three men used to describe people. Not theirs, us. And, damn it, it's true. As more details reveal themselves. Yes, now, I'm sure of it. They never actually spoke, but each day I know more and more about them. Not sure why, but I think it's just a matter of me losing what's always put me behind the eight-ball, here, in the first place.

'The three of them spoke like the woods and the water, the light and the wind; I never *heard them*, I sensed what it was they wanted to communicate. Yes, it's true, they never opened their mouths, but yes, I do know it; know that Anglos is the term they used for all men who aren't natives, Indians.

'But they were so different, not like any natives I've ever seen. Not Chitimacha, Choctaw, or Coushatta. And yes, those faces. They were cut and sculpted, polished stone, beautiful, dark mahogany.'

Marchon listened to his own breathing as it mixed with the cicada, cricket, and loons—awake now— and thickening the air with a whine-like rasp and moan. One breath and then another and he and the waking forest were synced, giving breadth, substance, and thought to the lightless air as it swirled up and in, then out of Marchon and back again. Extending his hand, Marchon felt a gentle, warm glove-like embrace. 'Yes,' he thought, '*it is true*—they never used words. I, I know I was groggy and sick, still, I understood what they were saying, communicating. It was exactly like *that moment*, that moment when Mere's face appeared over me. When I felt the sounds and the meaning more than heard them.

'The moment Mom and Dad died. I knew it even before she appeared. Looking up from the crib, Mere's face was like the sun appearing, trying so hard to smile as she fought back the tears. Hell, what was I, thirteen months old? No words, it must have arrived on the wind or the light, because I already had the image in my head. 'No words. I could see the flat hull of the flippedover air boat, see both of them laid out on the shore. Mere had the photograph in her head. All I had to do was look straight through her eyes to see and touch and remember it. Now those three.'

As he dredged up the memory of the three Indians, Marchon felt a twinge of electricity run through him. Their faces touched off a connection to what he remembered Pere saying to one of the few, rare visitors he and Mere received in the heart of the delta.

A painter and a retired oil man all in one. "Ordained to be in the business," was what the old man said when I graduated high school. Work in the fields for a year then into the front office and when he was ready to play golf, it would all be mine! Boy-howdy, them's the way it works for the lucky few who got it! That there black gold running in your veins.

"Pissed don't get the half of it when I told him, 'Paris to paint. Yes, sir. Eighteen, primed and ready to be the next Picasso.' Needless to say, when I arrived with portfolio in hand at the art institute, it was not so much what they said, it was what I read in their eyes. Cold and honest. God damned that stung.

"So, I tucked tail and headed back home, ready to be ordained in oil. But there was one last thing I wanted to do before I left. I went one last time to see the Champs Elysees, at night. You see, at night, the headlights and tail lights of all the cars and taxis and buses blur and glow and run together like a Monet tableau as they travel up and down that gentle sloping avenue. Turning to leave, saying good-bye forever to the City of Lights, I saw the rest of my life, all of it, perfectly, down to the last detail before it even happened—in her eyes.

"She was a flower girl at the Arc de Triomphe and for forty years, my wife. Stayed one more week and we were married on the eighth day. Took one more day than God, but hey, he never saw Paris. No, lost her two years now, and well, I love the coast, the delta, and I miss her and how I felt when all I wanted to do was paint and be in love. So, I travel and paint. I'm old and starting to break down. If I don't do it now, when?"

He rubbed Marchon's hair and smiled and started to speak and then the miming motions of Mere and Pere caught his eye.

"Our grandson is different," Pere said, smiling at the man while motioning for Marchon to run along. "Like a two-way mirror on the face of the delta and all of nature. In him, and through him, both run through one another, and well, I only wish I could see and hear what he does. We've come to a sort of understanding. Motions more than words."

The visitor started to speak, but Pere waved him silent.

"No, please, I know what you are about to ask, no, there is no problem. None. He is a polished diamond brilliant, too much so, only because those around him are so coarse and unpolished. A relic from a lost time, I am beginning to believe. My own father spoke of a phantom tribe of Indians, chased here by Jackson, Andrew Jackson in his purge. Father said they were like extensions of the light, moved like the wind. "Once as a young boy, he told me he had wandered away from his father. A big cat watched him from a low limb. When their eyes met, he knew it was over. As the cat rose to leap, he felt a hand on his shoulder. Looking up, there was a figure that appeared to have been chiseled out of walnut, smiling.

"The puma jumped and bounded toward the young Indian man, then stopped short and rolled over on its back. The Indian smiled and scratched the big puma's stomach. Father said the sound of that big cat purring sounded like a small outboard motor idling.

"Marchon, there, he, ah, has that gift and curse.

Yes, a curse. It's all going away. Here, the delta, I mean. You would know better than I. What will become of him when they clear this place for industry and when you and I are gone?"

'So, it's real,' Marchon thought, 'Pere's story is real now. Good, I know I'm not mule-kicked, crazy, touched by Legba. Yes, it is real. I had the evidence, in front of me, in the old mystic's hand. Yes, the eldest of the three Indians, the one with fire trapped inside of him. He held it up first, then motioned for me to insert into my ear the little, crescent-shaped ear-piece. After I placed it inside of my ear, I was home. No barriers, and all the white noise was gone. There no longer were two worlds. I was firmly rooted in and a part of the world that once dreamt of me as extension—all of the delta, the universe and light racing out and curling in and through me.

'So, one dream informs another making them both real. Until now, I could never trust that memory.

No, not so much because I was dying; it was built differently. I'm different now. I don't struggle so much to mix and match what I see and feel in the forest, in the river. That man looking past the opening of his eyes is in the center of my head—me, free and easy and starting to open up, flower. It's like that damned bear wrestling inside of my skull is hibernating, or just gone now, leaving me alone and connected. I just hope it sticks, lets me continue to be, well yeah, me.

'If I could only find them! Almost worse knowing, it's true. I was beginning to accept that I'd gone completely crazy. Was almost happy with the idea. Now? I know that without those three, and well, are there others?'

Six months ago, back from an extended and successful trip into the heart of the *entanglements*, Marchon returned to his tiny lean-to lodge, his sled overburdened with pelts. Excited, as he unpacked his haul, to begin the process of preparing the hides. After washing and scraping them clean, Marchon was hanging them out in the sun before going on to the next step, tanning them.

Marchon felt a soft touch, like a feather graze his cheek. Looking up he saw nothing more than a gust of wind pushing hard through the slash pines. Returning to his work, the same soft glancing touch tickled his ear.

Looking up, again, nothing.

Shaking his head, he thought, 'Easy now, not another human soul for a hundred miles, just the wind playing tricks.'

Mon petit! The light! Our pretty lady is showing her thigh, mon dieu, c'est belle!

Marchon thought he heard footsteps a quarter mile away. Putting down his scraper, he wiped his face and started to ease down the embankment when from both directions he heard the quick, snapping, and gnashing of feet running through the underbrush. Spinning around, he lost his balance, wrenched his knee and fell hard, hit his head slamming against a rock, then rolled down to the river's edge, out cold.

Waking, his head was throbbing, his knee

swollen to twice its normal size, his mouth and throat dry. It was difficult to swallow. Trying to stand up, his knee revolted, buckling, then dropping him flat on his back.

Again, he heard the snap and rustle of feet in the underbrush and thought, 'Okay, there was something. Haven't lost my touch. Dead meat for the taking, now.' Mere's face appeared, hovering over him as it had when he was still in the crib. Her eyes were cut-crystal and iridescent making it almost impossible to stare into them.

'So, yes, it would be her, as I slip away.'

A strong, leathery hand eased under his head and raised it to a small drinking gourd. Marchon felt a warm, peppery sensation chase down his throat. A pleasing burst of energy began to run through him. A moment later, his head was lifted a second time. The liquid now tasted sweet, its scent like mint and honeysuckle. His head felt clearer, his knee was no longer throbbing.

The leathery hand pulled Marchon's head up to the drinking gourd a third time. Now, he could see that it was not Mere cradling his head, but an old man coaxing small sips of water from the tipped gourd to his mouth. 'So, I'm dead,' Marchon thought, 'makes sense that Mere would be my last living vision. She really was like the sun to me. This must be some sort of caretaker or I don't know what, purgatory, hell, heaven, the inside of my dreams? Wait, Pere told me, yes, his name is Charon, the boatman that transports all the souls across the river Styx. Hope he'll take an IOU or the unfinished pelts. Right? Pere said you have to pay him.'

As more of the water trickled down his throat, Marchon felt his head clearing even more, his lungs beginning to move like a bellows, finding new spring and life. The water, now, tasted of herbs and licorice. His eyes completely clear now, Marchon could see that the man holding his head and feeding him water was extremely old with long, white braided hair. It was the old man's eyes, though, that startled him. Buried so deeply down into his stone-like face, Marchon felt like he was looking into a moonless night sky, peering into twin radiant stars.

As the old man's eyelids opened and closed, bursts of color and soft, elastic streams of light monetarily filled each eye. Marchon swore that he now heard water moving, the sound of the undertow pulling out, then the crash of whitewater as the waves curled and feathered out to cover the shore.

My, my impressive, you, an Anglo, can touch it without aid. You are the first to hear our steps, sense that we're close. Never have we encountered such an Anglo. Yes, you feel the light as it cycles from point to wave to point, but you hear something new. Even strange to us, yes, like an echo from our past, running deeper still until, my, my...like your own heartbeat in her womb. 'Whispering to me, whispering without moving his lips,' Marchon thought. 'I hear it, without words, directly from him, through his eyes.'

The old man smiled and nodded. His chiseled, squared chin, immobile under a long, sweeping, flat nose, reminded Marchon of a rock formation Pere showed him as a child, "Lafitte called it Casque Guerrier, like a medieval war helmet. See the flat protrusion to protect the nose?"

Without a single word spoken between them,

Marchon felt calm and safe, understood that the water he was drinking had a mix of medicinal herbs in it. He felt their healing properties, and more.

As it occurred in that moment, and then relived and remembered during the days that followed, Marchon's healing became an elastic, revelatory, lucid dream, and a haunting reminder that there were two worlds, and that he was rooted firmly in either one. Just a trinket suspended between two poles, suspended and dangling.

'One foot in either door,' he thought looking into the old man's eyes, 'leaving me where?'

Marchon continued to study his healer, he appeared to be more of a vessel than an actual person. The outline of his body wavered from distinct lines to a malleable fluttering as if it was about to be taken up and transported out on the wind. His age was impossible to guess. His manner of silent communication was simple and easy and, surprisingly, natural to Marchon.

Absent the white noise of words, Marchon found the old man's silence soothing as he began to feel himself open up to the showers of music-like inflections, colors, shapes, and echoes he knew emanated from the old man and were now forming whispers within his core that rose up and flooded his senses.

Blinking his eyes, Marchon thought, swore to himself that a month had just passed. The old man nodded and smiled.

Odd and magical you are. Unlike any Anglo I have ever encountered. Perhaps we were drawn to you, or even dispatched. I weep from your pain that our small party created by frightening you. Ah, but you take to the water like mother's milk. Good.

Yes, the water, Marchon now understood it to be a mending potion, a mixture of roots and herbs, that the old man had placed into a clear, crystal cylinder. Into the cylinder the old man had poured water from a pouch marked with five strange signs: ||≈☉≈||. As before, Marchon understood all of this without actually having seen the old man perform the tasks. He understood all of it to be true from staring up and into the old man's eyes. Yes, like Mere's when he was still in the crib and saw his mother and father wrapped in canvas bags on the bank of the river. As then, it was now as clear as a picture.

Now awkward barriers and filters collapsed. Marchon was beginning to see and feel what he had always known was alive and restless—another world—there within reach. Still, until the old man's eyes released him, he had been almost helpless to embrace it. A floodgate opened, Marchon was no longer blocked by the odd filters, barriers, and words of his childhood world.

Gliding and floating within himself, and then with a simple thought, now able to project it outward, he watched as his thoughts now became waves pushing into gathering points, colors, and bridging notes of the forest and the wind; all of them moving to mix and match then collapse into an expanding stream of light that jumped, leaving behind numbers and linear time.

Connections, seemingly long-ago lost were restored, as he felt himself becoming a part of an ever widening circle, expanding. Riding and racing free of all limits, Marchon was startled to see and sense and know that it was and had always been present together there—yes, there—the old man, no different than a bird drifting serenely on an updraft, were both simultaneous and ever present.

Now, the old man was smiling, but with a concerned, almost paternal angst covering his face. From the soaring, he and Marchon dropped and found themselves on a cool bed of spring grass. Next to them a stream, clear and without a bottom eased past them. *Troubling and unexpected. I sense and feel echoes and light I have only seen in my dreams and now with you, they grow stronger. Here, just rest here for a bit,* Marchon understood the elder. *You have jumped in ways that truly frighten even me, the eldest of the tribe, with just this first ingesting of the water. We'll work through it. Measure it to suit you. You were so close to death we had to act quickly, yes, but there is something more. It is odd for me to hear this wondrous new tone and feel the water almost whispering. Yes, it was the water who whispered: Here, put this one here. I suppose for a familiar and healing place for you, but I sense that there is more. Strange and wondrous, you are for an Anglo. Now—sleep.*

Marchon knew, without a doubt, that he was dead. He had just experienced the last moments of life as he stepped into death. One last, the most tantalizing of all, dream of his life as he passed into death. He was sure of it.

'How else, could I know?' he thought as he dropped off into a long, dreamless sleep only to wake up the next day and see the old man, yet again.

Watching the old man work, nodding and smiling, but never speaking, yet Marchon understood him, with more and more ease. Understood that the water from the pouch, mixed with the roots and herbs and then steeped in the crystal cylinder—together—this combination was drawing in and concentrating the restorative power of sunlight, and more. Even the water itself had begun to massage the underside of Marchon's thoughts and senses that even the old man found, *Revelatory, my young one. You are mystery.* 'Still, surely, I'm dead,' Marchon thought, 'how else could I know the meaning of the symbols on the pouch? Know that they signified the eternal cycle of life and water, bound and driven by the power of light, the sun, and the odd, push of water sounds beginning to...yes, I hear them everywhere, how?' Yet, when he looked up, again, into the old man's eyes, it all seemed natural and easy, this knowledge that was both reflexive and reactive to the place and moment. It was no different than breathing, just life as an expression of a world racing out, expanding into larger and larger circles. Again, another conception of which Marchon was, now, certain, but not sure. 'How?' he mused.

Even the sunlight haloint the old man's head shone differently. Peering up and into the old man's eyes, Marchon, again, caught glimpses of a fragmented spectrum: soft rose, pale blue, lemon, translucent green. Suddenly, the old man was laughing.

You surprise all of us, perhaps me more than my two companions. Outside of our tiny tribe, we have never encountered one who has even a fragment of our connection. Even without the channeler, the ear-piece I gave you when we first found you, you catch a ride, hold on to the movement, the push and pull, the inner flooding of your senses connecting with outward flow of all that is alive and expanding—a gift, sadly, your race lost long ago. And now you draw out and measure the whispers of the water. A connection that even the elders spoke of with reverence.

To even sense and feel a bit of what I wish to communicate is very striking in one of your kind. Yes, I know, in this moment, you feel more than you understand. That is the problem with your language. I've slowed the pace and whittled down the other voices so that you might be

more secure and trust me. Our manner of communication? I suppose the Anglos would call it whisper or dream speaking. Silly and childish, but we will use it, to help you to relax and heal. Yes, it will do for now. Maybe, in...okay, yes, we will use your word, time. Time as you call it, does not exist. You and your kind limit all that is living with it. Still, we must use it so that you can understand me and move on.

You will understand, I hope, that your language, like this word, are more barrier than release, a string of closed doors rather than an endless number of open pathways. But for now, I will use it. The most important issue is for you to trust me, so that you may heal. And who knows, seems that it may be you who teaches us something of the water, if I am reading the movement within the light, properly.

'What a wondrous dream to have,' Marchon thought, 'and what a pity it is to be my last.'

With each sip of the mending water, Marchon felt markedly better. As his eyes and head cleared, he saw the other two members of the party, another elderly man and a young man who appeared to be no more than nineteen or twenty. And still it all felt more dreamlike than real to Marchon. No words were ever spoken. All that transpired among the four of them was a serenity that Marchon could only connect to how he felt suspended in water—an instinctual knowledge, Marchon mused, but was growing stronger in him, even now. 'Sadly, this wondrous connection is now just coming to me as my life begins to slip away.' The three, statue-like natives who inhabited this, his last, dying dream? Guardians of the small tribe, the last of their race, that hid among the entanglements. A search party to guard the safety and security of the tiny tribe, to try and ensure that men—the Anglos—never discovered their whereabouts.

Prior to the first awakening of Anglo men, before the first "humans" stood up to paint the cave walls, this small sect had roamed and migrated, moved to stay free. To remain absent from those who refuse the light and symphony of life here.

Absent, yes, you understand us and our dilemma. You are so very much like us, here. You understand that to be absent from your kind is necessary, a precaution to prevent us from being hunted or enslaved. So, just as you have chosen this place, we choose a region that the Anglos fear. Their fear makes it easier for us to go unnoticed, and survive. Still there is so little space for us now. We are three sent out to make sure there is no trouble near us.

'Near where? I've never seen them. And who were the others that this search party was out guarding?' Marchon thought as he watched the young man and the other older one nodding as they fashioned a splint to help stabilize his knee.

Once finished they handed it to the elder healer, then comforted Marchon as it was tied and adjusted in place. Marchon was amazed at the strength of the youngest of the three, an apprentice; at least that is how he remembered it later. With one sweep of his arms, Marchon feeling like a doll in his cradling grasp, he was up and transported back to his lean-to. Within reach were a supply of assorted berries, dried fish, a large gourd full of the mending water, and a yellowish-green paste. Suddenly, the healer's face appeared again, but even closer to Marchon's face, their eyes locking into a blink-less stare. Marchon, suddenly, felt as if he were

tumbling, then floating, and then his, the healer's voice, wafted up as if coming from a stone dropped down a deep well.

I must risk much, with you now. You are very close to dying. The water can only do so much; these berries, the fish can keep your body alive, but you have suffered greatly.

Gently plying the paste on Marchon's forehead, the healer then opened Marchon's shirt and covered his chest.

It works with the sun's light. Just as plants draw in its power to feed and live, this will allow your body to absorb and use the sun's light and life. We will stay with you until we hear your breathing breach the divide.

Sleep, now.

After an hour, Marchon felt his body involuntarily seize up for a moment then relax. His heart fluttered, and then his lungs cleared. He had the odd sensation of "seeing" his blood beginning to flow easier and faster, the sky and the sun above were briefly broken, flecked and shaded with a peacock's tail of color. Looking up into the old man's eyes, Marchon saw a brief smirk and nod from him as his hard, firm hand eased Marchon's head down onto the ground.

The old man nodded, once more, signaling to the others that his patient was safe.

For the next ten days, appearing at sunrise, then returning at sunset, the two elders and the young man appeared, to feed and care for Marchon. Was he actually alive or dead? Marchon still was not sure. Still, he felt himself growing stronger and becoming whole, again. With the perfect punctuation of light and dark, marking the arrival and departure of his silent saviors, Marchon, was still convinced that he was dying. 'I've never been around anyone, not a soul, not even me, who seemed more at home here. Seems, if I were to blink, or look away just for a second, they would fade into the landscape, filter down into the river or melt into the branches of a tree. Yes, those three, Mere and Pere and me.'

Marchon looked out into the blackness and steeled himself for the coming day.

'At least there is this pause. A small place and a brief moment between the light and the dark where I fit in. Still, it gets old. Done wore out ten sets of skin trying to shoe-horn into all this chaos and confusion. Never could find any version of who they wanted me to be, or get a decent answer to any of their god-damned questions of why I wasn't a fit there. I'm just plumb wore out, tired of being a catfish out of water, thrashing and flapping, desperate to jump off the dock and back into the river.'

Where else then could Marchon go, save for someplace exactly like this?

'Yes, my hole in the hill!' he thought. 'And peaceful...sort of.'

Facing east to catch the rising sun, his hole and lean-to were tucked under a stand of slash pines. Marchon's home was both a window and a recessed haven for a man who had 'never once felt comfortable in my own skin,' he mused as his internal alarm sounded just as the crisp-carved screech of a red-tailed hawk immediately followed it.

Sighing, Marchon listened to the easy rise and fall of his lungs, the rhythmic pumping of his heart as they began to match-up and move with the wetlands stirring out of sleep. 'Perfect, not

another human sound, save for my own, within fifty miles of here.' The delta was still and lightless, but the air was pulsing, taking a good long waking stretch as it started to stir and prepare for the new day. Marchon listened and thought of Pere and the name he had given this place: the entanglements.

'There it is,' he thought as a loon's call echoed out and over the hard, two-cycle engine whine of the cicadas.

'Yes, there is the symphony of *entangled music* waking, excited to see *her*. Yes, she. Pere was right, the entanglements is a woman. There is nothing more beautiful than she, the morning light rising up and out of the water. She unmakes and remakes me all in one deft stroke, daily.'

Six weeks ago, and finally strong enough to make the trip into Port Sulphur, he saw *her* in physical form. After preparing all his pelts, Marchon desperately hoped his purchaser would still want his goods.

Most everything he trapped was shipped to China. His purchaser in Port Sulphur leased half of a container that left New Orleans four times a year for Asia. With his routine wrecked, Marchon was at a loss as to what he would do if Old Man Fletcher refused him. Dangerously low on food, missing his celebratory bottle of sour mash, Marchon decided that there was no other way than to push through and hope Fletch would cover him. Convinced he could make the trip, Marchon headed out, but soon found his stamina lacking. Still, he pushed on. A mile out from the village, he was spent.

Stopping by a small lagoon to soak his neckerchief, wash his face, and rest, the sun was just beginning to rise. Across the lagoon, perched up on the hill was an abandoned seafood restaurant and a small one-axle trailer. Rising up to stretch his back, Marchon smiled as he watched the sun beginning to stamp a series of vibrating footsteps, shaved-lemon-slips of light onto the face of the water.

'Magic never disappoints,' he thought. Letting his eyes continue to drift across the water and then up to the emerging sun, he felt his stomach collapse. Deep inside, knotting up into a tight-fisted ball of adolescent-like fear, Marchon tried to stay upright, but doubled over from the momentary shock of pain. Righting himself again, the swift, clean spike up from his gut repeated itself then softened as *she*, the lithe, wet burning body of Adele, appeared.

'Can't be, no, but damn it! How is that possible here?' he thought.

Just south of middle-age, her nude body still showed all the signs of the athlete, the elite swimmer of her youth, lithe, firm lines cut cleanly and glistening in the early morning light. But why here and now? It was never a choice with her.

From the moment her memory began to shape and form, she had always felt the pull to find one place after another to glide and feel, celebrate and dissolve into a body of water. A competitive swimmer all of her life, she, now the gypsy wanderer, still continued to swim alone, early each morning.

On her way to the gulf coast, she had paused here, just outside of Port Sulphur. Her home, like a turtle's shell, a small one-axle trailer, was perched up on the hill overlooking the lagoon.

The sculpted man-made lagoon fed by a small creek, perched under. The Catfish Kitchen, Port Sulphur's only destination eatery was now abandoned due to the ravages of Katrina.

Tired of the road, needing gas and a cool drink, she asked the owner of the local Stop-n-Go, where a body could find a quiet campsite and a large pool of water? Smiling he told her he had just the place, forgotten and secluded, picturesque and safe.

As she waded out of the water, she saw Marchon watching, and waved.

Marchon, again, felt the adolescent implosion roil in his core as if he were still in the smokehouse peering through the branches as Mere's grandniece visiting from college showered. Panicked, a little frightened, but aroused, he was helpless, unable to stop his staring. She stopped, still waist-deep in the water, and raised her arms skyward and shouted, "Not bad for an old girl, now, is it? Here until tomorrow, join me, if you've a mind to. Okay?"

And then plunging headlong into the lagoon, she was launched. For the next thirty minutes, her long, easy strokes circled in the water peppering the air with easy, soft pops and kisses. Marchon watched. Then watched longer, unable to break her spell.

Perfect cadence and rhythm, her strokes soon sewed the air with a pleasant soft machine-like hum. A heron, a small gaggle of geese, and two loons dropped onto the water and began dotting the shore drawn to her long, soft signature of sound in the water.

Even the water seemed mystified, questioning and anxious to know more of her. She swam and then swam some more, and the world seemed paralyzed in her presence.

Stepping up and out from the water, she headed straight up the bank, stepped into her clothes, turned, waved, and then walked up to her trailer—gone. Yes, *her*, but having ridden the light was, now, in new form, a part of the sweet, burning acid that once released into the system, never cools.

Marchon closed his eyes and saw Adele, who, oblivious to his eyes was free to wander unencumbered, blissful and celebratory in her freedom under the caressing wash of water.

So, who among us, would not become enchanted and forever tattooed by that voyeuristic theft? Even gods sprouted feathers, hid themselves to extend the moment, jealous of the water as it streamed over, caressing her unfettered joy. Water to light mixing with the sweet burning acid of blinding possession creating the perfect marriage: the perfect lithe, gleaming, and revelatory expression of her pull on us.

'From that moment when I was fifteen, my sanity was never settled again', Marchon mused.

'*She*, Adele, Mere's grand-niece visiting from college, knowing she was alone in the outdoor shower, never knew that I was hidden away in the smokehouse.'

Marchon closed his eyes and looked through the hole in the air bridging the lagoon and Mere's shower. With each long easy stroke, he heard the scatter-shot sound of the shower and fell deeper and farther down through the chanting and mesmerizing song of the water and light stretching out before and now plunging straight down, up and out of him.

'Yes, okay, so this, the delta, the entanglements, the only place that will have me, allow me to settle within and in myself, has gifted me, yet again. First there was the old man with

crystal eyes and now *she* has jumped time, returned, and as always what brings them all to me is the song and chant, the pull and whisper of the water.’

Marchon stood up from the dense stand of water reeds, and stared up at the small trailer perched on the hill. Her silhouette shown through the small window. A thin, sliver of light sliced the lagoon in half, then quarters, now eighths as he swore he heard her say, “We know the same whisper, the sounds only water can make if you are willing, able to listen. I know him. From one pool to the next I heard him. Suppose that’s why I was drawn here?”

Marchon continued to stare out of the small opening of his lean-to into the waking delta. It was another day arriving that for Marchon would be a day unlike as it was similar to all the others he enjoyed here: unfiltered mixing and matching of new, fresh sunlight that refused to order or modulate anything that might represent a sense of time. Alone in his burrow, Marchon felt not loss, but an increasing calm and strength.

Awash in a world devoid of words, Marchon was finally allowed the simple and penetrating, revelatory and liberating space to float in and on the wind as it tossed and turned the slash pine heads as they scrambled and bent low to catch the latest whisper or perhaps a new song welling up from latest dance called out by the river. With the new sun and changing light, pitch black to rose to powder blue, there was formed a cooling hand to close the furnace door and offer a short reprieve. Nestled within his tiny hole-in-the-hill, Marchon was, again, treated to the silent and lightless pause that was his sustaining reprieve.

A new day arrived. Marchon held it tenderly in his eyes, musing,

'As *different* as it was the *same*—yesterday. But what is *yesterday* now? As the light and water speak and pull me out, I expand and contract, move and fly as the wind through my lungs, sensing and sure that the air and water refuse all shackles, and so catching a ride I soar with new purpose seen from new eyes; I become the same flower reopening for the first time, here.'

Marchon—and his delta—home.