

THE JUNGLE TATTOO

The man who lived in this apartment before me
painted the walls jungle green so they would look
like the deep round "O" of a forest pool in shade,

but really they remind me of the man himself,
who, upon handing me the keys, had said
he had lived there ten years, alone,

that the neighbors were quiet,
but few of them friendly,
and I should keep to myself,

then had turned down the hall, revealing,
through the cotton white lucidity of his shirt,
a back covered by the tattoo of a tiger

whose black eyes stared out
from a tapestry of jungle vines,
emerald embroidered branches,

snakes like strings of topaz slithering
away as if slithering along with the man
down the white florescent-lit hall.

And I want to ask him now, as I sit on the couch,
rubbing my thumb over the needy brown upholstery
watching lights go out

in the darkness I have inherited,
if there is something that made him need to cover
nakedness, like loneliness, in color.

At what point in his ten years alone
did he decide on that tattoo?
Was it in a moment like this,

when night's charcoal shadow was closing,
like a hand, over the yellow light of lately lit apartment windows,
and the walls were going black,

in spite of the color, that he went
to have his body pricked by a solid reminder
that something could exist in absence?
That the dark unholiness of a body,
with its isolated, heavy-metal sting of solitude,
purple-bruises, and blood-dark songs could also be

the dark web of trees, a river, red flowers, green leaves spread
so wide they might shelter things, like dew drops and pollen,
the rock-round back of beetles, waking in the dark to flap

their wings through the heartless black, unafraid, so that when he would fall
back into himself, alone, in this room, he would land,
like that tiger, two paws dug into the solid earth, able

to look up through the lucid green embroidery
of the jungle's never sleeping leaves, to find
even the inside of himself, still illuminated by stars.

Cobalt Poets Series # 307 ~ January 31, 2012 ~ Poets(SuperHighway.com/cobalt) ~ "The Jungle Tattoo" first appeared in Bloodlotus, Issue # 12



Hi. Tresha Faye Haefner here. I don't believe in writing bios in the third person. I also don't believe the word "bio" means "list of publications." (Although if you WANT that, you can find it at www.tfhaefner.com.) I am a poet from California. I've lived primarily in the suburbs and, when I was much younger, on a farm with goats and chickens and a pet pig named Quan Yin. The first poem I ever heard was "I wandered Lonely as a Cloud" by Wordsworth. The first poem I ever read on my own was "The Raven," by Edgar Allen Poe. The first MODERN poem that ever made me want to write was "The Lost Land" by Eavan Boland, followed a year later by "Story" by Brendan Constantine. I learned to write poetry in the coffee shops of San Jose, and on some very solitary trips to New Orleans, New York, Washington D.C. and Vancouver, Canada. I moved to L.A. in the autumn of 2011, and currently teach a class called "Out of the Blue" in Culver City. Here are some things I love and often include in my poems. Tattoos. Rainbows. The Paintings of Marc Chagall. The Bombing of Dresden. Homeless people. American Cities. Strangers in Coffee Shops. Loneliness. Love. Students I've Had in My Classes. Sights from the Suburbs. Sounds of the Oceans. The Meaning of a Life. The Meaning of a Death. The Forests and Food Courts. Snakes at My Parents' Place in the Desert. Dead Mice. Live Media. Stars. The Internet. The Moon.

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