

O, like Jonah, like anybody
across the brow like a savior
delivering relief — O James Dean, our own
icon at the drive-in, now lost forever
it was something about the eyes
just like Jonah, dark-lashed
depths and shadows of eyes
saw too much, had seen
too much; it was way later
a stout sleazy queen down south
remarked O how remarkable, those eyes

get you in trouble, Jonah would sigh; wish
(he often said it) I had any other kind of eyes.

Remarkable, saw the same eyes in a photo of Jack Kerouac.

MEETING GERALD LOCKLIN AT THE HOLIDAY INN BAR IN GREAT BEND, KANSAS

was this incredible
thing because, years and years so many years
like an old pair of scissors we have occasionally
crossed blades in the same places — that is, our work
occasionally cohabited on the same pages, which
does not instantly make for could you say "bonding"?
(I was afraid maybe what I laughed at
was supposed to be taken serious) but

O, incredible, Toad's a Teddy Bear, which just
proves maybe if you live long enough
and everybody's patient
Sonya Heinie wins the gold, the Cavalry comes
over the hill in time, and Fortune smiles.

— Ruth Moon Kempher
St. Augustine FL

MEETING THE TOAD

we're introduced in the tiny lobby
of bbc radio humberside
and trade small talk about magazines
before our fifteen minutes on the air.
"been in pearl?" he asks.
"yeah."
"how about wormwood?"
"nah, he hates my stuff."

the toad has never heard of me
and i've been reading his poems since college,
yet he's gentlemanly and attentive,
giving me copies of his books,
telling me the names of editors
i ought to try when i get home.

i wait for him to bait me,
to size me up and slice me down,
but he's just interested
in where i've published, what i know.

no real surprise, of course.
it is the most consistent rule
i've learned about writers:
the poet who's feted for his gift of tongue
is only looking for a lay,
the guy you're sure will be a prick
is generous and kind.

THE LADY LE GROS PUB

i get on stage and do my schtick.
a few to make them laugh,
a few to make them think
i've looked inside myself.
okay. not bad.
i slouch back to my pint of bass,
happy i didn't choke.

the toad lugs an armload
of books up to the podium.
for forty-five minutes
he calmly delivers the goods,
his breathing labored
above the laughter and applause.

his final poem
is unexpectedly solemn.
"that last one,
about your father's death,
really kicked my ass,"
i say when he is through.

the toad stares at me
through lenses thick and smudged.
he doesn't say a word.
he doesn't have to.