

Tradition has it that Tang dynasty poet Li Bai died after drunkenly trying to embrace the moon reflected in the Yangtze River.

How did Li Bai die?

- The sky a dark beginning, the moths thrashing themselves to death in the candle oil he left at shore. He stepped off the bridge and walked into the belly of the river, the moon like a jade in his mouth, thought he could wade into it, take it in his arms, after all the drunken serenades finally touch it—
- The sky a dark beginning, the moths thrashing themselves to death in the candle oil he left at shore. He stepped off the bridge and walked into the black water until it swallowed him. Didn't give a reason.
- His heart gave out in a mountain inn, the white horse still sleeping in the stables.
- He left home on a raft and sailed alone through the green mountains, the gibbons in the oak trees shrieking their senseless longing. After twenty-one days, the mist from the mountaintops rolled down and swallowed him. Fifty years later, a woodcutter found his shinbone under the limestone cliffs and thought it a wild animal's.
- Alone in his bed, the blood clotting in his brain, his brother still sleeping in the next room. The poets always have to make it about love.

How to Turn Into the River

1. because you worry that you are an empty room pretending to be a human. because you find yourself standing knee-deep in muddy ditches, lightning rod in hand, waiting and waiting for something to happen. because you wish to be formless, rootless, without memory, to slip through time like rain through the fig leaves. because you wish to have the hands of a river, to hold every creature's heartbeat without spilling over.
2. don't try this at home. try it instead in jagged mountain streams, your body, in the cold, forgetting that it is a body. try it in the space between a thunderclap and its echo, your name like shocked birds without a skeleton to roost in.
3. did you know that, at any given time, around two-thirds of you is made of water? that with thirty percent of you gone, you would be indistinguishable from a river? listen: drowning is just the leachy membrane of your body unhinging around its home, giving you back yourself. listen, don't open your mouth.
4. listen: you can't become the sky, no matter how long you stare it down. you can't become the river just by standing in the river. there's no meaning to this, but if i write it down like this i might just fool you. listen: you knew this was a poem, not an instructional manual. you know the water always ends where you begin. you know I'm only writing in second person to pretend these hands aren't mine, that i'm a snake oil salesman and my best con is my longing.
5. has it worked yet?

Suns

Last night the storm tore a bough off the bauhinia tree
and scattered it across the sidewalk, and the leaves
will yellow in a few hours but now are still green.

You must be in another city by now, a different skyline and
no moths to confuse your shirtsleeves for mislaid moons.

This is just to say that the cats are doing fine, but I think
the orange one might not last the winter. I kept saying
I'd visit you but I never did. I ate an ice cream drumstick
on the side of the road today, the chocolate sticking
to my fingers, the buses blowing my hair into my face.

Everyone in a smart blue uniform is you. Yesterday
I stepped on a snake by accident, a bright green thing
sunbathing on a grassy patch of concrete. I jumped back
and it squirmed away into the bushes and I thought of you.

The orange cat was dozing in the parking lot again, and I
thought of you. The hills were golden today, a field
of rotting suns. Oh, how I wanted to gather them for you.