Paradise

by Ginnah Howard

From the rumple of pre-dawn Queens, sure South on 95, to almost Savannah by dark; still cold, but we're full of what's coming: heat, palm trees, and pelicans. Heavy wraps lifted. Then that last stretch through the back bayou. Tide's in. And mostly we walk, walk to places we've been: along the Gulf road—dozens of brown pelicans still convene on that abandoned boathouse: this bird who headfirst dives sixty feet to grab menhaden, surfaces, then tosses the gleaming flash, live, into its dark pouch; golden crown back, swallows whole. We watch one such fish thump the walls of its captor's belly. Then, down to the docks lined with camp chairs of fisher-people—one woman, feet on the rail, her pole between those feet: HERE.

Where I want to be.

Up the side streets from the waterfront's ever-rising condos, cracker cottages: tin roofs and burnished clapboards, hunkered low on a few squat stones. Where the real locals live. Not for them these houses high on poles. Bring on the hurricane and tidal wave, the summer stink of fish and sticky noons, bugs. No one resides in Paradise. Still it's strange no one's out along the way in this wonder of air, sky, pansies in January.

Why I need seasons: that jar of change to wake me up.

Low tide. Crossing the mud flat at the end of the single airport runway, we're startled by a swath of motion: the scuttle of fiddler crabs fleeing footfalls; the males hefting their one vivid claw, needed for courting, their swagger of claim. And leaving behind—its last struggle written in sand—one dead horseshoe, more spider than crab, unchanged for three hundred million years.

Try that for getting down to size.

We come upon a bush, burning orange with butterflies. “More than we see all summer back home,” you say. Viceroys: Mullerian mimic of Monarchs, whose larvae silk-wrap chewed bits to the leaf's midrib: cache. Come cold, roll up to form their own hibernaculum.

Available online at *«http://fictionaut.com/stories/ginnah-howard/paradise»*
Copyright © 2013 Ginnah Howard. All rights reserved.

Time and heat: from winter quarters, we emerge.