

# Breath and Shadow

*by* John Olson

I respect trees. They purify the air and shade the ground. I respect their silence and mosaic of leaves and squirrels, their peculiarities and sprawl. They attain spectacular heights and bend with the wind without losing an ounce of dignity. They exude an inherent nobility. It is a privilege to wander among them and follow the curves of their vigorous asymmetry. I stray from the path and slip in the mud. I see something gleaming among the trees and assume it is a river. I go to the river and unfurl my being. I open inside. Something in me feels damaged and needs healing. I imagine the pain as a rag of blood and squeeze it and the blood drips on the rocks giving them the appearance of speckled gray eggs. I appeal to the wind. I appeal to the water. I grab a walnut and watch the ground teeming with ants. I take out my gun and shoot a cloud. Rain comes spilling from the cloud. The cloud disappears. The sunlight returns. Coins of sunlight dapple the ground. Steam rises, sweetening the air with the fragrance of rot. I fish, and furnish myself a dinner. Slabs of pink meat sizzle in a frying pan of thick black iron. I wallow in rumination. I dig a hole and bury thirteen dollars and a spool of red thread. I break the eye of a fish against a tree and stomp on it until it is nothing and the fish cannot see me anymore. I do not like it when the dead look back at me. I grab a rock and throw it at the sun. Shadows of sound spill out of my mouth. I shout. I whistle. I fulminate. I scream. It is broad daylight but I can see the moon. The moon is full. The moon is the cadaver of a beautiful woman floating in the sky. By the time the sheriff and his posse arrive I am ready for them. They see a naked man arise from the earth. They see a naked man approach them with his arms outstretched and blood running from his eyes.

