

Raft and Rag

by John Olson

...but really, what is the story if not the raft we float down, our own individual raft, its width and logs a product not of analysis but of the abyss over which we float, imagining ourselves as Huckleberry Finns and Jims of a fabulous Mississippi whose spine lives in collision, ripples of sand and rock, and whose nectar comes from the rings in the water after a fish rises to snatch a gnat. This is the true Academy. The Academy of the Soul. It is greater, and less expensive, than any writing class. Creativity can be guided, but it cannot be taught. The sun cannot be taught to shine. The sun just shines. Each person is a sun of bold laughter. Experience seeps in through perception and large easy thoughts roll it out onto paper or dance it into pixels and those ghosts of cold memory become warm again. They are fed testimonies of consciousness sewn into a kimono of sound indiscriminate as sleeves. A thin piece of buzz, a motor revving in a garage, a larynx dilating to let out a song, the Yukon of nerves making life palpable again in words. Intensity is a valentine. Emotional tornados that rip through the lips. Even shaving is a canyon of deep concerns, private urges, idioms of wisdom in collision with the arenas of loud conformity. Pulp fiction keeps us on our toes but the pulp I have in mind is the pulp of mud and mass and fruit and arteries. Charles Baudelaire eating electricity in Paris. Meaning going wild in a zinnia. Curios of afternoon light in a negligee of smoke and mirrors. A new philosophy stirs in its surgery. Awakens on a raft. This candy of birch and pine. This rough divide of grain and conjuration. This semantic gestation inside a locomotive rag.

