

Man Once Stood on His Dock—

A small dock at the edge of a large lake
That trimmed his land to the dorsal shape of a shark
If viewed from a low flying plane.
The man followed the line of houses across
The lake to where the horizon met an island
Or more aptly, a hill topped with pines,
In the center of the lake—
A place where high school kids
On weekends headed after slipping
Their parent's canoes into the water,
Sprayed gold by sodium lamps,
And went to the island talking of archetype and Jung,
Or Odysseus and Troy, it makes no difference.
The man went to light his charcoal grill,
Saw his wife shape in the kitchen window,
Washing potatoes for dinner.
He splashed a cup of gas on the coals,
Stepped back, tossed a match, then walked the path
To the dock which creaked under his weight,
Just past where his land ended and the shared waters
Of his homeowner's association began.
He took a cigarette from a pack in his jacket
Pocket, lit that, watched the island,
Which did not move—capped with green,
Red dirt flowing into water
And saw a silver flash, perhaps a canoe, and again,
A silver flash—then again, and he understood,
Three short, three long, three short flashes and again—
And thought a couple kids, perhaps one of his own,
Out there, stuck on the island after a day flunking
A math final, then paddling out to the island

For sloppy sex and a good heart to heart
About being misunderstood.
He looked back at his wife in the kitchen window,
Could see her lips moving, singing, *Go get them.*
He checked the fire, which was beginning
To burn on its own—the coals just now glowing
And he estimated, he had time to kick
Off his shoes, strip to his shorts, leave his cell phone
On the lounge, dive, come up for air,
Count, like in college, count his strokes, pause
To mark the flash which was still flashing,
Three short, three long, then nothing,
And he imagined himself swimming
For the green-capped island,
His wife out on the dock now, calling
The neighbors who all come out
To watch the rescue of the kids
Who just went out to fool
Around and got into trouble.
There was a helicopter overhead making waves, news
Crews arriving from nearby cities and setting up
On his deck, awaiting his return,
The moment when he emerges from the water,
Exhausted, towel wrapped around his shoulders,
Mic at his lips, medics guiding him
To the gurney, oxygen mask strapped to his face
To soothe his cramps—the neighbors
Out waiting to lift him up
And shoulder a parade through their streets,
Him back with a story, one so heavy,
He could barely swim
Back under its weight, how he saw the flash,
Jumped in, swam, followed the flash, until it sank,
How the kids went out to the red dirt island
To fool around, signaled

Him from a distance, how he swam,
Oh, how he swam
And barely made it back.