

Lee, After the War

Carolyn Elkins

Cleveland, Mississippi

He stayed in Virginia
on a small piece of bad land
with no view of the river.
He sat on the porch
at the end of every day
waiting for the sun to set.
The first winter was warm;
thick grey fog rose up
from the unseen river
and seemed to him to rain down,
a slow-motion rain.
Each drop a man, he thought.
A slow rain of good men.

In the spring he came into possession
of a pair of peacocks,
symbols, he supposed, of the past,
nods to aristocracy.
Their cries at night
carried over the water
and made his hair rise.
Each time it sounded like the shriek
of something human.

He remembered how once
near the end of the war
he seemed to sense the enemy,
marching all night
in long columns
lit up by sheet lightning.
They looked, he had thought even then,
like a dark blue river.