



JEFF FRIEDMAN

## SNAPPING TURTLE

When a snapping turtle crawled from the alley onto the sidewalk, I stopped immediately. Someone had told me that they're surprisingly fast, even though they don't look fast. I decided to give it a wide berth and walk around it, but as I hurried forward out into the street, it blocked my path. I cut the other way, hoping to get behind it, but somehow the creature turned quickly enough to prevent me from passing. I picked up a stick and held it out like a foil, but the turtle stared at me as if he had no idea what I was doing. Then I touched his nose with the stick, but before I could pull it back, he ripped it from my hand, chewing it down to a cigar stub and spitting it back at me. I felt a hand on my shoulder. "Excuse me," a short man with a thick red beard said and walked toward the snapping turtle. "That thing might eat you alive," I warned, but he didn't look back, and the turtle let him pass. Then a slender young woman with a lip ring sauntered by, entering the donut shop on the other side of the alley. The turtle must be asleep, I thought, or turning over some kind of new leaf. I shrugged my shoulders and headed by it, but the turtle leaped out, snapping its huge jaw, almost catching my knee. I backed up, but as I backed up, more people passed. Then a whole crowd came up behind me, parting around the snapping turtle, who made no effort to stop anyone. That's when I saw my opportunity. I fell in with a group of ten tough looking tattoos, confident that the turtle wouldn't budge, but just at the moment one of the tattoos laughed oddly and another tattoo gripped his own neck with both hands, giving me the choke signal, just at the moment, it seemed impossible to stop me, the turtle shot out, grabbing my leg in his jaw and taking me down. Then I grabbed his neck with my

hands, choking him. I cried out for help, but people ignored my plight, some laughing, some talking and some holding their cellphones. The overhead light blinked red and red and red. The Dunkin Donuts closed up, and the sun slowly faded into evening. When my fingers loosened, the turtle vanished from my grip, leaving me exhausted, alone on my back. As gnats came out in swarms, I righted myself, snagging dozens with my long red tongue.

## PIECE OF STAR

Late in the afternoon, I found a piece of star on the ground. I brushed it off and shook it to see if I could get it to shine, but it glowed only a little. The piece of star gave off a sweet scent, like a spice cake with loads of brown sugar. I tasted a little corner of it. It was soft and crumbly, not dusty or sharp. I liked the taste so I ate the rest of it in two bites. Craving more, I searched the grass and the ravine for the other pieces of star that must have fallen, but couldn't find any. Then I noticed the chickadees, finches, and phoebes carrying bits of star in their beaks, flying up into the trees, thousands of birds appearing at once. When I returned home, Greta kissed me on the lips. "Your lips are sweet," she said. "And you're glowing." I went to the bathroom to look in the mirror and didn't need to turn on the lights to see myself clearly, my face bright, my body emitting a blue and orange glow through my t-shirt and jeans. "I ate a piece of star," I admitted. "Do I need to take something?" Greta shook her head. "I'm sure it'll be out of your system soon enough." Later in the evening, I gave off so much heat and light that Greta stripped off all her clothes and jumped on top of me, laughing as if something new had come into her life—wanting to make love again. When we finished, she seemed happy, but then she couldn't sleep because the light was too bright. She piled blankets and comforters on top of me and put on a mask. By morning, my glow was gone.

## THE GENERAL

*Tis like the distance on the look of death* —E. Dickinson

The General floats in space. He's a satellight on a mission, a NASA moon, a bull with luminous horns, plunging into fiery capes. When he speaks, the universe listens. His troops swirl into gases forming planets and solar systems, networks of volatile materials. The enemy fires at him, but their missiles disappear into black holes. Their laser beams blot out stars, but not the General, who cartwheels in space, who dallies with red dwarves in strategic outposts. The General locks in his targets and clicks a button to begin the devastation. His wisdom glows like an egg balanced on the ledge of darkness. His explosions destroy even the distance on the look of death.