

James Scannell McCormick

THE SEA

Jones Beach, Long Island

He kissed him, set ear to the winged arrow over
The other's heart. Naked, they'd braved the breakers. Now, both
Slept, surf-lulled. We, swim-suited, saw through that couple.
Then, lover-like, though not lovers, I
Followed you out into the uneasy sea. Far. Where our
Deep feet could barely paw the sandbar, the sea-water
Drew down past our cold ribs, gathering. You bobbed. Crouched.
Or hurled yourself into the dead-weight waves. But the just-
Breaking peaks clutched me, winged me like an arrow
Towards shore. I was drowning: it takes only a teaspoon
Of the Atlantic to do it. And nearly did. Awash
In breathless panic. Concussed, I crawled, stomach scraped, out. Sat,
Wet. Pretended not to tremble. And after you, salt-shiny,
Joined me, I handed, with steadied hand, cigarettes and lighter
When you asked. Yet eventually, the groping tide caught us
On our towel. One inexorable swell soaked us. Soaked him
And him, too, who shook and wrung and, to each
Other smiling, left. They didn't give us a second thought.
I did, though, them: as I, in bed that night,
Still felt heaving me, open-mouthed within itself, the sea.