

Kevin McNeilly

Lucky Thompson on Manitoulin

Woodshedding wasn't what he had in mind.

Too old school for cool, he blew off Georgia
and headed north until the roads petered
away. The Tobermoray ferry ground
on the pier's creosoted piles, skronking
like his tenor on an off night: the sound
of deadweight out-of-line jazz. Nobody'd
know who he'd been, or what he'd played. Sceneless,
he disappeared into Ontario's
backlot, his last green room, and taught himself
how to practice better, how to retire. Music
got seeming more like unkicked addiction
than bad habit, dogging him even this far
gone from public earshot, his fine remote
domain – obsolete, absolute. Packing
his weathered horn, he'd hoof along groomed paths
through the grass alvars to Misery Bay,
only to find he'd forgotten his reeds.
Still, faking served its imperfect purpose.
He stood there fingering little else but air,
his eyes like wet quartzite, scanning the south,
sussing out his horizon's final bar.