

JAMES TATE

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*A Crane Calling in the Shade*

Paulette was tall and beautiful in a world-weary sort of way. She had been married five times, and walked with a cane. She had been in so many harrowing accidents it would be hard to say which one caused what. She spoke five languages. Former heads of state were old friends. But now she had moved back to the old village of her childhood. "I'm tired," she told me. "I just want peace." "Well, you can have all the peace you want here," I said, "but, if you get bored, there's plenty to do, too. And you'll be pleasantly surprised at how many wonderful people live here." I didn't hear from Paulette for another six months. Then one day she just showed up at my door. She looked awful. "I'm lonely and I'm bored. I can't sleep at night. I keep replaying my whole life over in my head. It seems to me as if it's all been one dreadful mistake after another. I should have never left here as a young woman. I should have stayed and married one of the local boys. Do you remember Reggie Faversham, what ever happened to him?" she said. "He died in the war," I said. "He was only nineteen." "What a shame," she said, "he was such a gentleman. What ever happened to Buster Gleason?" she said. "He's still here," I said. "He owns his own paint store. His wife died a couple of years ago." She seemed to perk up, so I felt like I had to add, "But, you know, Paulette, he's just a good

old boy, gotten paunchy, and he's mostly bald. Buster's never been to a concert or a play in his life, and his conversation is pretty basic, if you know what I mean." "Oh I wasn't thinking anything like that, Vince. I may be lonely, but I'm not completely crazy," she said. Paulette stayed for dinner, then said goodbye, looking like a lost woman. I went into my study, took out a piece of stationery, and wrote, "Paulette will marry Buster within three months. Three months later, she will leave him and return to Paris." I dated it and put it into my desk drawer. My cynicism disgusted me, but, the good news is, I'm never right.