

PAUL GUEST

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*From the Black Lagoon*

From shallow water the deep shimmer came.  
In black and white, in three dimensions,  
in a blurry sweep before our goggling eyes,

the creature from the Black Lagoon  
shambled stiffly up from the brackish pool,  
draped in epaulettes of black-green kelp,

and snatched from sun-warm reverie  
the blonde and helpless bather for his bride.  
Down to his sad underworld he sluiced,

with her horror in tow, writhing,  
full of drowned scream, her hair streaming.  
In the crook of his rubber elbow,

he held her with a webbed, inhuman, paddling hand—  
and if she was saved, returned to air,  
wrapped wordlessly in a towel

against the coldness of shock,  
I can't remember, and begin here to guess.  
After long struggles in a slant light,

after the raking of his claws  
through the flesh of would-be heroes,  
after chaining her bare ankle

to the bone-littered floor of his homely grotto,  
after swimming off in grace  
to meet men who wanted her back,

who would pierce him again  
and again with the long barbs of harpoons,  
after all this, beyond air,

she would be saved, and come to love  
in the agony of rising  
the man who pushed water from her lungs.

And in my imagination this is fine—  
an inspiration, this breathing in to,  
this wondrous salvation mired in dreck—

I'm grateful for it, though I forget  
myself, that I was ever there  
with hundreds treading water together

to watch with cheap cardboard glasses  
perhaps not these scenes,  
not exactly, I'm sure, but roughly akin,

projected on old canvas that fluttered  
like a sail in summer wind.  
And to turn for a while from the film

was to look back upon a sea  
of strangers in water to their waists,  
if tall, to their breasts or necks

if not, all of them in that strange dark  
seeing through red and blue lenses  
the creature swimming toward them,

up from that fatal depth, a dream  
of loneliness, impossible to kill,  
the heart in the throat rising like a scream.