

EMMA SYWYJ

Oranges and Flowers, Malaysia, 2006
Photography, 8 x 8 in



MICHAEL PEARCE

Armpit

You say it stinks
but maybe you weren't listening
back then, before eyes and ears,
when color nor form nor feral moan
could tell you what to love,
when to run away or be absorbed.

Or maybe you ran with it,
chose your choices
and dragged the men
behind you, sniffing and grunting
their profligate intentions,
their murderous lust.

It's a jungle isn't it
all splendor and innuendo
talking up a storm of molecules
that head straight for your juicy parts,
a second crotch that knows what
he needs and bleeds the call of ache.

Scrub it hard and fumigate
and dress in pungent silk and
step inside that smoky bar
and smile from every organ
and tell your eyes to forget
what they know until it's too late.

Then fly like a buzzard on pilgrimage
to that mass grave for consorts
of rippers and black widows
that is the true fountain of life and pray
like a monk or a mantis for this gift
that leaks, that reeks, that burns forward.

Michael Pearce's stories and poems have appeared in the *Gettysburg Review*, the *Threepenny Review*, *Spillway*, *Epoch*, the *Yale Review*, *New Ohio Review*, *Conjunctions*, and elsewhere. He lives in Oakland, California, and plays saxophone in the Bay Area band Highwater Blues.