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Beetles in Moonlight

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Beetles in Moonlight

By Gordon Grice

This rooted cliff is riddled
and pocked. On August nights,
you can watch the moonlight clatter
into shards that move apart
and come together to couple.
It's the mating time
of certain black beetles,
scarabs with clubbed antennae.
Try to hold one,
and it smears you with its dung,
struggles against your hand
with claws complicated
and ineffectual.
Leave them alone, and they crawl
this canyon in clusters,
male on male on female,
and their phalluses protrude and turn
the corners of their metaled bodies,
more like spiked tongues than genitals.

You can find them all day, but dusk
brings them to a turtlish frenzy,
and by the time the moon
is high, the ground is resplendent with them,
every crevice of the cliff
disgorging them, a black tide that blues
beneath the moon, and then the moon
seems to crawl about on their backs, each
sleek body carrying the round entire
reflection of the moon,
a thousand moons
mating and forsaking.