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.