

Sea Slugs
by Jerry Prager

One lies before us on the lee shore,
a giant slug washed up on the beach, a brain-sized,
liver-shaped lump, gray and black-veined, glistening dry,
not yet baked, secreting mauve fluid onto Shell Island Shards.

A second swims up with a muscular grace,
angelic from the depths like a manta ray
flying up the rising floor to beach beside the first
as if to share its fate.

With a forked stick I rescue the first and
restore it to the lee waters; it revives.
The second throbs on the beach.
Set again in the current it re-asserts its will
and beaches again. The first is vanishing below.

Rescued a second time, the second seems to realize
its change in fortune; stretching its wings
from its lump of a body it glides off the other way,
refusing to provide me with a symbol of romantic re-union,
ungrateful blob that it is.
Paul and Pat board, he to the tiller,
she to the lanyards.

Shouldering the bow off the beach
I inch the keel out of the sand.

Staining to catch the current,
I draw myself from the chest-high surf,
from just-cleared rudder depths.

My legs and arms and back surge with
uncommon prowess as I draw myself onboard,
a hero in my own eyes again,
despite the slug that rises to watch us go,
mocking me with its lumpy realism.