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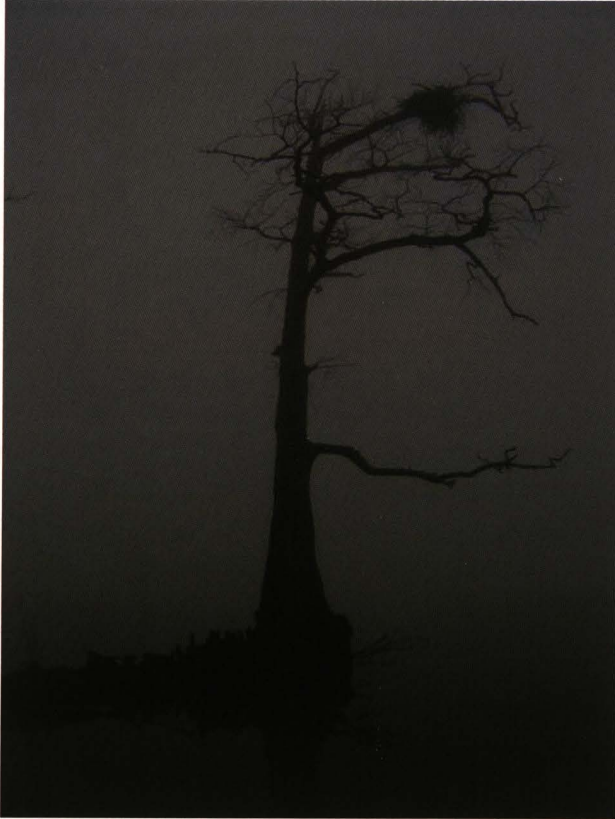
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jar full of helpless fireflies she doesn't know she's suffocating. Then he smiled a greasy, oily grin of sharp teeth and sharper tongue. The smile slipped from her face, but the vapid, hollow expression remained fixed. She noticed that his gums were black and he wasn't wearing shoes—they were the only things that could keep her distant mind where it was and away from the entirety of his face riddled with jagged edges and invisibly flaking skin (burning, maybe?).

Ask and ye shall receive, my child.



—Jordan Wade

She was struck with the sudden urge to run away from the house, just take the car and drive to a temple, a mosque, a cathedral—the closest door to God she could find on such short notice. She would take her vows right then and there—let the courts grant her a divorce on their own schedule and let her earn back (maybe buy back) her soul at her own anxiety-ridden pace. Instead, Marcy gulped, hard, and crushed the foreboding feeling rising up into her throat, as thick and painful as a broken light bulb.

The kitchen was alive with activity. There were fresh cookies on the counter. The stovetop was inhabited by a quartet of pots and pans alive with recent use. There were place settings for three and a pitcher of fresh lemonade. And, except for the sizzle of the food left to its ruin on the stove, silence reigned supreme.

It was an uncomfortable sound—Silence. It wandered in the small places, the