

LEAFLIGHT



SUMMER PHOTOGRAPHS

by

CHARLOTTE MANDELL

WITH TEXTS BY ROBERT KELLY

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**Metambesen
Annandale-on-Hudson
2020**

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*Summer Photographs by Charlotte Mandell
with Texts by Robert Kelly*
is the seventy-first
in a series of texts and chapbooks
published by Metambesen.

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Green is the god of peace
has entered the turbulent waters
the gloss of meaning
as they swirl his message
onward and outward and back around

*the faster we move
spin swirl and whelm
the quieter your heart
will be looking at us -
we are wild for you
so be at peace*



UNDER THE LINDEN

Through this green permission
everything I am passes
on its way to being
what it can be
for you.

 This
is my city,
this is its thoroughfare
from where the golden woman stands
out to the unknown fields
that must become my city.
This is a long avenue
to saying what it means —
it all begins with you
and must come to you again
in the all-ness of your majesty,
a girl in the green woods.



We see from what we see
that water is a mineral,
a swift stone
that lifts the colors of all
it hurtles through
and makes them in a strange way
permanent, the way
a glimpse of someone lasts
a lifetime. A mineral,
a lifetime, a stone, a story
rushes past us, we understand
utterly what we have seen
but it is hard to tell, hard to tell.
Bend down and stroke
the hurrying stone to show
that you have understood.



THINGS SEEN

1.

Cast in cold bronze,
an emperor.
Or drifting almost meek
from tree to tree
an oriole.
Nothing is mute,
no one.

2.

I think he reigned
when China ruled the west
and poets like Li Po
came from like Tibet.
The transcendent, seldom
useful, unforgettable
truths of played-with language
have to come from somewhere.

Call it the west
so they can answer the risen sun.

3.
The face so smooth,
humble nose, lean lips
but softly closed,
a miracle of gentleness.
Copper and tin.

4.
You could hoist it from its pedestal
and bring it to the temple
where it could serve
as a Buddha's face
or bodhisattva's,
glowing in the flickering light
of butter lamps,
light one for me.

5.

The bird aforesaid
has to make its own way
but when he gets there
to the house of the elect
the chosen branch, then
he is worth your reverence too,
sandarac shimmer of his embonpoint,
pale orange glow in leaf shade.

6.

In old Anglo-Norman law we read
la utilite de la chose excusera
any little inconveniences
of smell or sight or sound.
The usefulness of the thing
is what matters to the law,
lawnmowers shredding our sleep,
that sort of problem. Or smells.
Or skylines pockmarked with
villas of the entitled.

But what will excuse the law?
What will let us go on sleeping
or wake in beauty
to listen to the oriole?

7.

You don't think I'd forget the bird,
do you? Charlotte was very
careful with him, quietly observing
him in the camera's sanctuary,
60x from across the long lawn,
a bird up close.

The great Black Boston poet¹
said *Look, look and remember--*
that's how to understand
whatever you see, flutter bird
or Tarot card, sandstone ruins,
shadow of a passing bird
crossing the features of a face,
the truth that only mirrors see

¹ Stephen Jonas, 1921 - 1970.

but never show.

In the evening I get to see
the pictures of the birds she's seen--
they are like Gypsy cards a little,
each one compelling, mysterious,
full of telling waiting to be heard,
and sometimes the leaves
speak louder than the birds.

8.

This is the real name
and work of sleep:
to remember
what we have never seen.

9.

Now of course the bird
has flown away
to other applications

and the emperor
is back in his museum
safe from incense and interpretation.
Monday morning,
banks washing money,
lawyers plying their chisels,
poets hungry for praise.
Sometimes waking
is a friendless task
but look out the window
and remember, all that light,
the sun has no friends,
she has her work to do.
Be the sun.



Blue isle
blue green
blue tile
to support the light
the blue tells
the blue told
the prophet
what to tell
she told us.
She told us
the devious
truths colors
tell, the blue
guesses among
the green shouts,
O believe me
she cried, the stream
is one inch deep
and that's enough
for whole cities
to sink down,
enough for all the water
in the world to wink

at you as it goes by,
an inch deep is too
deep for most of us,
fall in the color,
swim in that damaged
light, or sainted
light that color is.
This is a living tile,
a resplendent scripture
to your doubts.
Look close
look far
this water
look close
look deep
look shallow
has all the answers.



The path is wet, the path
is wonderful,
is passion. If you can walk
on water you go anywhere,
effortless. Walking
is just standing there
and the water does all the work.
Maybe the earth too
when we stand *really* still
the earth walks us
where we would go.
But I digress. The point
is green. Within it
(the bifid forest parts,
the light lets in)
the water path
exults in its quiet
way, exults in sheer going,
that's what the Baptist
had in mind, blessing
all those who came to him,
dipping them in what flows —
John the Dipper we say

in Germany, we watch
each move, we do not see
though what the water
(so clean, so clear!)
washes away. I stand here
in this strange land
with my mind on water,
on green going, on being
and being gone, light
in the trees. Evening
on its way. But the stream
Metambesen will soon
enough bring the day back.

But what I really mean
is going with the stream,
I want to walk with it,
companion to water, walk
beside it, inside it,
I want to be where it goes.

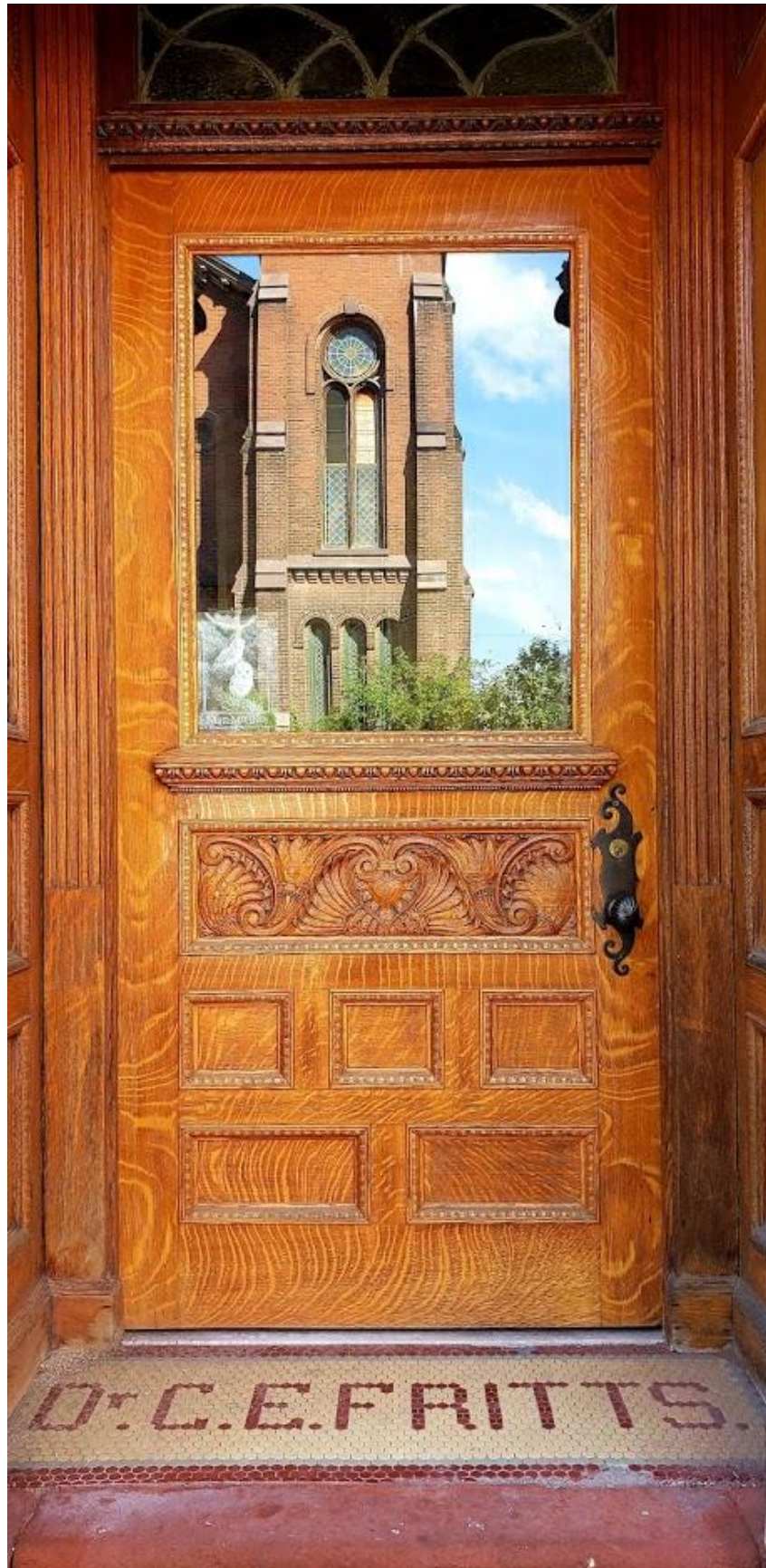


THE SUN TREE

I would walk there if I could
and pluck the ardent fruit
it offers. What could a man
do with the Sun? All the love
in the world won't save him
from the sublime instantaneous
combustion the moment
he reaches out his hand to take,
touch and take. This tree
bears the sun. If I could
I would walk right up to the bole,
climb the bark, gather all
the light into a shield that would
save me from the source
of it and me and all of us,
parley with the Queen herself
and then walk home in twilight,
the time my father used to call
the gloaming, and he knew her too.



Pooling
where it happens
and the flow
becomes instead
a person who stands there
seeing you.
I feel brave
when I look at the place
where the quick stream
pools slow
and looks at me.
You know of course
that things look at us –
we are what
they mean to see,
you know the feeling
don't you
when a tree
stares at you or a rock
fixes you with its hard
compassionate eye.



A DOOR IN HUDSON

A door to begin with
is magic.

Any door.

That door in Hudson
carved wood and a window
clearest glass
perfect mirror

shows
what is behind you

but not you.

A really perfect mirror leaves you out

shows only what you can't
by your own self see,

the world behind you,
as if you are transparent,
a glad grand honest witness.

We look at the mirror
and see a church across the street,
tall and grey,
dignified as stone is
(but why is stone so often grey —

does the earth hold colors frivolous,
leave it to childish us
to chrome and rouge and paint it up?)

You'd see through the door
if you stood inside
not just the church
but the busy street, people
enough like you to keep them at arm's length,
see them through the door.
Out there

is what it means.

A door is where the world begins.

Pale wood
varnish glow
around the dark
where we see

what is not there
but here, far
before here,
the place from

we come.
The photo calls it
a church and why not,
noble structure

mostly empty
most days and only
in the rarest thinking
strangely full.

The door says that,
says A door is between,

between you and you know not,
between maybe and you know what,

A door is all
the answer
most of us get

but who bothers asking?

Turn the knob
touch the wood,
it's mind against matter
all over again,

are you open?
Is anybody home?

