

# OUT OF THE BLUE

It is dawn along the Hudson, more reflecting  
Pool than tidal estuary here, some 300 miles  
From its shy beginning, set within a gasp  
Of Adirondack cliffs, working its way  
South from Lake Tear of the Clouds.  
Would that all our mornings were given  
This way: hushed, a slight breeze sent  
Wafting along the shore, its tumbled rocks  
Awash from the ambivalent pulse of the sea,  
Its ebb and flow felt in Manhattan's Battery.  
The mourning doves' keening wail  
Is buried by the lilt of a single song sparrow.  
A solitary man sculls his way to the Tappan  
Zee, his gunmetal hair a halo of broken  
Light, seeming to give birth to the peregrine  
Falcon bursting skyward, only to return  
To hover a flailing oar's length away,  
To cast a shadowy wingspan onto the rower  
Cowered in his shell, watching it climb  
In wide circles, riding thermals, fresh  
Kill in mind, just for the sport of it: one,  
Two, three miles high, setting a holding  
Pattern, eyeing his prey below,  
A white-throated swift, drifting, unaware  
Of her last strokes on Earth,  
As the slate-gray falcon, sleek as an F-16,  
Cups its wings, pierces the air at 240,  
And plucks her out of flight, talons  
Snapping her spine, as he shakes her  
Loose, sending what remains to splash  
Close to the sculler heading for shore,  
Wondering whether the sky is serene  
Once again, as he takes his daily commute  
To Vesey Street, finding himself at Calder's  
Bent Propeller, touching it for luck as he  
Does every work day, sending him back to  
Nam where the habit began, patting  
The unbent propellers just to make sure,  
Before climbing into the cockpit of his  
Skyraider to fly off into combat, a snapshot  
Of his wife taped above the G-2 compass,  
But today as usual, he is walking  
The courtyard toward his office, often kept  
In clouds, the tower he has come to call  
Tuning Fork Two, its cladding shimmering  
In the blazing sunlight. The elevator gives  
Off a deathly glow, always has. Settled now  
Behind his desk, that same picture smiling  
Back at his touch, he flips open the first file  
Of the day to see what client 223ER wants  
From him this Tuesday, and instead runs  
His early morning backwards, to the falcon  
And the way it dive-bombed him before  
Soaring off to its eyrie, safe atop the west  
Tower of the bridge, searching the open sky,

all the way to Haverstraw where a 767  
is roaring in, its crazed  
hijacker flat-hatting it,  
wobbling 500 feet above  
water,  
jinking every  
which way, the falcon long  
gone  
as the bent  
one revs the engines  
to 465 10,000 gallons  
of fuel  
sloshing in its tanks,  
just 4 minutes from  
target.  
the sculler will feel  
the jolt  
in his corner office  
and raise his head,  
see a fireball  
blasting from the other  
tower,  
windows  
shattering, sheets  
of paper  
filling  
the air  
people choosing free  
fall,  
aflame, some  
holding  
hands as they step  
out  
into the grave,  
as the last  
12 minutes of 18 spend  
themselves away,  
the p.a. announcement  
clearing the air:  
"an accident, a plane, next  
door, this building secure."  
his wife calls,  
begs him  
to come home,  
he'll leave  
early;  
he puts  
her picture in his shirt  
pocket,  
and freezes  
as he sees  
an airliner  
rounding the Statue of Liberty  
heading for  
his window.