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For a Fifteenth Century Zen Master

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Norman Dubie

For A Fifteenth Century Zen Master

for Stephen Scafidi

Ikkyu, a blind girl steps over the red staves
Of a tub. Steam rising from her shoulders and hair,
She walks across a dirt floor to you.
I think you are not her grandfather.
You watch with her a pink man
Who has avoided taxes for two winters—
He is being judged by roosters
And has been chased this far into the countryside. Above
him
Burning sacks of bat shit are arranged
In the purple branches of the thistle trees.
The river is indifferent to him.
And so are we.
You tell your mistress the burning bags of dung
Are like inert Buddhas
Dissolving in a field of merit.
She giggles. A front tooth is loose.
With the river bottom clear as the calculus, her father,
The bargeman, sings through the hungry vapors
Rising now like white snakes behind him.
You told his wife that Lord Buddha made wasps
From yellow stalks of tobacco with a dark spit.
Down in the cold bamboo a starving old woman

Has opened a small pig—
The new moon climbs from its blue glistening viscera.
Or light from infinitely receding sacks of shit.
Ikkyu, what is the difference?