Summer 1996

The Owls of '23

Brendan Galvin
THE OWLS OF '23

Sepias of an old winter: a man standing full height under a berg like a grotto deposited on the beach, behind him the marshes a frieze of no color, spiky with terrors, a northeast wind you can almost feel in the photo. Months of snows off the polar cap, with spook flights floating down to cut in and fuel yellow eyes on the backs of rabbits opened and left. All night the houses complained around stoves, the cold beaking entry, and the stories were of a coastguardsman stumbling along his beach route upon an owl untying the mysteries of a cod, of fish sealed in the river like sequinned slippers, as if the world's integument had turned inside out and warmblooded life went on down there. A white owl in November means weather you'll remember, a saw new-minted that year, when, watched by snow, a man learned to look about him for a pair of gold eyes, and looked beyond mud season for something like a stump leaning sideways as if hanging on in a gale, and beyond the sepia crew of the Hannah Rich
caught waving on deck as though reprieved of mortal duty, a joyride of breaking ice that kept them and left for the horizon.