

Robert Fanning

Man And Corpse at the Bridge

I'm done with you, Corpse, says Man,
lugging him toward the apex of the stone bridge.

It's back to the dark mouth I go, says Man, to which
Corpse remains silent as he is wont to do.

Here we'll hang. You and me. Man and Corpse,
twin fish strung for the gnawing current.

But Man struggles, one arm over Corpse, his other
fumbling with the rope in the all-watching dark.

Man's made the noose wide-looped to slip
round two necks at once, but Corpse's gangly

heft makes Man fumble, the noose loosening
as Corpse's slack jaw clop-clops some dumb

mute prayer Man interprets as *stop*.
Huffing, Man stares down into the current's

black mirror long and hard, then goes: *Corpse,*
that's it. You'll go it alone. He wrangles

and yanks one end round Corpse's ankles,
dangling that dead heifer-heavy lunk

over the edge. For some time, Man sits
on the verdant bank and weeps, as Corpse

sways and spins and creaks, a pendulum
over the river, that dark vein to the sea.

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Family Dinner

Everyone gathered here is family, says Man's mother
raising a toast, the wine in Corpse's glass

rippling on the table beside his empty plate
as Man stands to toast with his brother, sister

and parents. Man's made Corpse up as dapper
as he could—a grey wig, a new black suit, silver tie

with a gleaming clip, matching pocket square.
As his dad slips his blade into the carcass

of the turkey, Man holds Corpse's arm
under the table to steady him.

How long have you known Mr...
Corpse? Man's father stammers. *Just Corpse*

is fine, Man says. *And boy, I don't know Dad—*
it seems like I've known Corpse forever, Man says.

Man's brother can't lift his head to look
at the empty space beside him, but offers:

I'll take you guys out on the bay tomorrow,
if you think he'd be up for some fishing.

Fork and knife in hand, Man opens his mouth
to respond but gasps, turning to see Corpse

no longer there. *Well, he's quite a catch,*
Man's sister sneers, as he props Corpse back

into his chair. *I don't know*, Man says, flustered,
standing behind Corpse to level out his head,

holding his shoulders as if giving him
a massage. *We'll see. Corpse is pretty tired*,

Man says. *Well, I'm glad you're here*,
Man's mother smiles toward Corpse, and Man

smiles back, in his chest the ghost wings
thrashing toward a field of safety.