

RICHARD JACKSON

Living On

I can't imagine dying because the Amazon Conidru, a kind of tiny catfish, swam up, as it did one man standing just offshore, his urine stream and into his penis,

or its monster cousin, Asu, the *driller killer* that burrows into flesh and eats your inner organs. Another catfish, the Giant Gooch from the Kali River in India, can swallow a man whole.

There are just too

many ways to die—
Sherwood Anderson swallowing a toothpick or Isadora Duncan getting her famous scarf caught on the wheel of the car she was in.

Death Takes a Holiday the movie goes, but it's a lie. It's Time's rusty pliers that pull at us. That's why Augustine mourned a time before the beginning of the world where time didn't exist, which now our scientists confirm.

But no, Death just goes to work like a draft through a window jamb, or the monster at the window that we just miss.

Therefore, the way to live is to know what you will forget.

Here the drought starts to drink the air. The sun reaches down for us like a mythic monster. At night we let the stars lie about their temperature. Even our dreams turn brown. The future falls out like sediment.

In the end we all pray for something, if only the need for no prayer whose words continue on somewhere in the future.

The dove on the inner branch watches me

as if to ask a question. We all have answers for questions
we can't express.

The birds that sing all night pray for whatever
we have forgotten or ignored, today for Ali Ferzat, 60, whose
drawings helped depose several dictators, whose hands were broken
by Syrian loyalists as a warning, and who lives on with his art
against the monsters.

I don't have to imagine how the grass waves
desperately, trees shed their bark, the Cicada leaves its shell,
and the heart walks out of Fear's mythical, impenetrable desert.