

## Oyster-Man

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Michael Evans

This morning, standing naked  
by the upstairs bathroom window,  
I watched an old oyster-man

pole his narrow boat  
through the meandering tidal stream  
behind your parents' house

Wide-legged, feet set to the steady rhythm  
of water under boat, he moved  
with the grace of his ancestors, slowly

pushing pole down to deep silt  
then raising it again, high like a vision.  
Now, the season three weeks old

by calendar alone, we come out here  
to winterize the pool, rake leaves  
from its bottom, drain water from the pump.

It is our ritual, of sorts, our distraction  
from the merciless month to come, the same  
cold question always between us: *How long?*

*How long?* In this October heat, salt  
stinging my lips, I try to remember  
when oysters are good,

the rubric my mother always used  
after the big supermarkets took over  
our town, offering year-round

foods she knew could not be right.  
*Only in months with an "r" in them*  
she said every time

she pulled a pint from those barrels  
brimming with ice set out in aisles  
next to the meat freezers.

I wonder if the oyster-man needs ways to remember:  
a rhyme to tell the length of months,  
a calendar for the day, a watch?

Work done, you sit across the pool from me,  
bare feet skimming water the last time  
till spring. With evening, the oyster-man returns

and somehow in this light it all makes sense,  
the way we can continue on like this,  
the way he has lost his age,

how his body measures only the passage  
of this stream, arms steady from years of touching  
bottom, his hands the color of the water.