

ELIZABETH CROWELL

Books in Cottages

Earlier, launched to one of those islands
so slight—a white fire of birches,
rocks to scratch the wooden belly of a boat—

we sighed aloud when we saw
a bald eagle, glow-headed, stretch
over the water of the lake.

It is so late now, so dark,
when a cottage door slams,
it sounds like a gunshot.

In the camp library, I find
an old, uncreased *Bleak House* that reminds me
of the soul's ambition to get through the story

before the body slung in a wooden rocker
on a birch-beam crossed porch
meets its end.

It isn't just what you didn't finish
that you leave behind,
So it is that *A Guide to the Birds of Panama*

ends up at this New Hampshire camp,
preface to a journey,
or yearning for what has been.

I troll my fingers in the manila pages
where the black print is so old it looks like
it still bleeds. The light above me flickers.

Though I hope
War is a Force that Gives us Meaning
might be what has been given up,

when I change the bulb, a whole nation
of dead moths falls from the fixture
onto the library's red-painted wood floor.

ELIZABETH CROWELL has published most recently in *The Worcester Review*, *The Sheepshead Review*, *The Hollins Critic*, and *The Healing Muse*. My essay, "The Tag," won the 2011 Bellevue Literary Review Burns Archive Prize for Non-Fiction. She lives outside Boston with her wife and two children.