

Published in Marsh Hawk Review, Spring 2019
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Sip of Djinn

I'm peddling puppies in the rain one day,
which is absurdly easy—think of the
little sad faces wet and pathetic—
when this djinn comes up and wants my last two.
I'm think, I do this, I'm done for the day,
but those two will be a blood sacrifice
soon. This one is a girl, waifish, kinda
cute, if you go in for shape-shifters. What
I want to know is good/bad/neutral,
only I suck at questioning so I go,
“Um, where you from?” First she swings her face side
to side no, but too far, like she's looking
before crossing the street; she's not comfortable
inside human gesture. Her voice—its voice?—
is a gravelly scrape, a dry landslide,
“I'm from the wilderness, you goat scat. Sell
me dog.” At her voice, the puppies cower
to the back of their box, which is soggy
cardboard inside a wire shopping cart.
No one's on the street. It's misting lightly.
The pavement's dry under the djinn, like she's
a piece of desert. I have to draw this
out; I need to think. There is a bit of
wanting to know her story; djinns are angels
that broke ranks, whose human pasts manage to
leverage their essence back into being.
Some you can capture—the classic stoppered
bottle thing—most are just dusty whirlwinds
without a master, powers at loose ends.
Have we met? seems like a come-on, and she's
a placeless thing, so I go with spatial:
“Where have I seen you before?” She steps back
and stands with her feet close, pigeon-toed.
Her chin rotates to over her shoulder,
which is sheathed in dry silk, but her eyes stay
on my face. It seems a casual look,
but feels to me like she sees through cross-hairs.
This time the voice has a liquid undertone,

a post-op scratchy singer, like Kim Carnes,
Bette Davis Eyes, the words a splatter.
“You road-rock, you stop-cock, you brief-life bag!
I come for your commerce and you think your
before can measure into time like mine?”
Now I can work. I look her in the eyes.
“Why not,” I say, “you're measuring into mine.
Commerce talks in cash, honey, unless
you mean to steal...” Ever see an angel
look agitated? This would be funny
if there weren't lives on the line. The djinn's arms
go up and down, featherless flapping.
She plants one toe and paddles in a circle.
She growls through clenched teeth, half-barking: “Erah!
Erah! Can't steal. Azazel would be enraged!”
She foot-paddles more. I look up Azazel
on my gadget: alternate deity,
something-something wilderness domain,
outgrowth of an earlier deity,
probably Babylonian. Clearly
one of those gods you're not supposed to have
before Yaweh. I scroll through images
of djinns. “I got it,” I say, “I know where
I've seen you: You're that perfume model:
Tommy Girl! No: Eternity, right? Right?”
If she's a model, I'm selling lions,
but what the hell, It riles the djinn, and she
levitates, but maybe only a few inches. When you're scared,
you'll try almost anything, so I hold
out my phone and my hand is shaking.
I say “This is you.” She takes it, poring
over paintings of djinns. Who doesn't want
to see themselves? And maybe she doesn't
reflect in a mirror. Have you ever
acted entirely on instinct? I empty
my metal water bottle in the street.
I dig in my pocket for coins. I flash
a Sacagawea dollar at the her.
“This is you too,” I say, and drop it in-clank.
She drops the phone and before it can clatter
on the wet concrete, the djinn is a swirl
of steam diving down the bottleneck.
I set the stopper and hold it up.
It vibrates furiously. There's the tin
rattle of a coin dancing in a pan.
I pick up my phone, close the browser. Shantih.

The dogs know it's time to leave. "Come on,"
I say, we're done rehoming for the day."