

ELIZABETH CROWELL

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## 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.

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**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.