

1-1-2009

## An Apologia for Marriage; Accustomed Hour

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### Recommended Citation

Ramspeck, Doug (2009) "An Apologia for Marriage; Accustomed Hour," *Yalobusha Review*: Vol. 14 , Article 28.

Available at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/yr/vol14/iss1/28>

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*Doug Ramspeck*

## An Apologia for Marriage

After one of those wintry days  
when the paper birches were skeletal  
in the open field, and beyond our eyelids  
the years were slipping one against another,  
moving like the slow alluvial passage  
of the river that now, now in January,  
interrogated us with its frozen stillness,  
we drove to help our neighbors  
whose house and barn had been consumed  
in a great fire that had blindfolded the sky  
with heavy low-slung clouds.  
In another life we had dreamed  
of smoke like that rising into the air,  
had believed that the sky would welcome  
it as fog and would make of the offering  
an incorporeal mountain we could climb.  
The moon was sick with smoke, and the stars  
couldn't believe that anything could reach  
that high, could exist outside the body,  
which was why, we knew, the distances  
seemed so great. When we stepped  
from the car and began helping  
our neighbors sort through what was left  
of their belongings, separating what was  
lost from what was damaged,  
a light snow began drifting from the sky,  
falling against us as forgotten ash.

*Doug Ramspeck*

## Accustomed Hour

The day is a body dragged from the congealing waters. She watches from the window.

Imagines that the yellow flags and Spanish moss and swamp lilies are a reliquary. Imagines the dull light behind the tupelos and willows claiming the hour.

What she asks of the morning is that a body learns to breathe once more, that the pale skin of day rises from the swamp like an alligator snapping turtle appearing with its plated carapace amid the pickerelweeds.

Her husband and children are still asleep, so this is the moment to conjure a life from the clamoring of wood storks, from the sweetgum trees oozing from open wounds the bitter resin.

Here is where the dead form as green muck in the stagnant shallows, where the morning falls as ash into the duckweeds.

She imagines the hours rising from the alluvium, the hours possessed at last in the small light.