

Volume 1, Issue 5, 2016

The American Book of the Dead

i.m. Claudia Emerson (1957-2014)

The heart stilled.
Who was the dead one now? No longer her body,
her cerements,
what did she gather, moving away?
She bundled up her limbs.

In and out of flame went the washed.
Who guarded her?
A god took the shape of a cat by a tree.
Beyond the great doors,
a barge sank onto a waiting sledge.

A spade opened the earth.
From our pitchers, rivulets braided the ink
of her past where it blurred.
Untie the bandages on her mouth.
Unbind her eyes.

We who brought saffron cakes and beer
leave them, just in case.
Fleeter than shadow, she crosses a pool
of natron, a pool of nitre.
Even in death, she cuts the green waters

as a lifeguard would.
I want to tell her I saw six white ibis
sail over traffic lights.
Across a parking lot in Florida they flew,
blank pages flapping,
wind-rushed, past whiter cloud.

Debora Greger