

Three Visions of Rachel Carson

—by *Eric H. Edwards, A Woods Hole Poet*

‘will you always then
live at the ragged edge
of things?’

1.

The first time; freshman biology class,
Ragnild (Renel) and I, constructing a paper
model of the DNA molecule, prettily colored,
spiraling up that ecstatic mystical ladder
scientific objects sometimes do,
she stood looking over my shoulder
her mouth shaped as if she had just said
amazing or beautiful, slightly smiling.
Amazing I said, isn't it wild!
Wilderness to the core and root and tide, she replied.
Do you love this? She looked at me.
I don't know, you mean biology? DNA?
I could have added Renel? Who was
after all attracting and smart.
No she laughed, like a frond
surging in the water, all of it.
I looked at our teacher sitting oblivious
at the head of the paper-dry class,
hollowed by the same invisible bugs
that eat museum specimens.
Above her blackboard a sign:
This is a labor-atory, not a lab-oratory.
I don't know, I confessed,
one of the early times
that word confession
emptied my adolescent shell
leaving a hymn of sighing surf;

will you always then live
at the ragged edge of things?
And my heart pumped
yes, oh yes, oh yes

2.

In a hospital night
 empty corridor
 my clogs on linoleum,
 my clogs great for standing hours,
 bad for stat blood-lab running,
 and I cursed
 my awful choice of shoes,
 when she appeared walking beside me;
 why did that pregnant woman
 get caught in a fire
 and now she has to die? I breathed,
 and breathed the air-conditioned air
 made for the place
 that tries to save others, the beautiful air
 she nor her baby
 would breathe much longer,
 she having eaten
 enough smoke to shrivel
 her lungs like old mushrooms.
 Why are you, so positive,
 and positive about the current of life
 visiting me now?
 Now is a bad time.
 Do you love this? She asked.
 I have to be here, I said,
 the government requires it;
 but yes, I love it, painful
 as it is, and it often is.
 Death hurts she said,
 that is why the sea's edge
 has so much life,
 to keep us alert
 to as much death as possible.
 For our own sake? I wondered.
 No, she said, for the others.
 When you go you won't care.

I turned in the empty hallway
 and hurried into the blood lab.

3.

Decades passed.
 I was mowing under the mulberry,
 taking down along with the grasses,
 in passes, some probably once-delicious
 brown mushrooms, past their attractiveness,
 gelatinous from the night's rain,
 when she arrived in front of me,
 still shy, not given to conversation
 except on the page.
 So I said, here, this mulberry lawn
 is your page, speak if you like.
 She regarded the mushrooms mostly shredded;
 such beautiful creatures, she said,
 and we think we know so much more of them
 than they do of us. Then she walked off.
 I felt sad, but happy too
 that she had come yet again and considered
 the same things I dealt with
 in the oceans and tidal pools of my own drift-life,
 the ephemeral forevers shimmering
 out, the shook foil of menhaden swirling
 and moving on,
 and I was struck
 by a golden arrow of light
 so fixed and absolute

I felt I would never recover
 from such a pure and mortal wound.

