

## I NEVER MEANT TO HARM HIM

I was sitting at my desk in my second-floor study when this helicopter pulled right up to the window. A man was leaning out of it shouting something at me, but of course I couldn't hear a word. I went to the window and opened it. It was still almost impossible to hear anything over the roar of the engine and the whir of the blades. I kept shouting, "What? I can't hear you." "Let the boy go!" he said. "I don't have any boy in here," I said. "Let him go," he said. "There's no boy in here," I said. "You've made some kind of mistake. I don't have any boy." I shouted. They finally flew away and one of them waved to me. I went back to work, somewhat rattled. It took me a while to regain my concentration. I was plotting my trip down the Amazon, but now when I pictured me paddling the dugout canoe, I also saw a small boy nestled in there, sometimes sleeping, other times pointing out large water snakes near us. The boy seemed very familiar to me, but, in truth, I knew not who he was. As the days and nights passed into weeks, our supplies dwindled. The rain forests were full of unimaginable sounds, screeches and hollerings during the night that made sleep almost impossible. The boy was brave, but rarely spoke. He stared at me with his big, brown eyes. He trusted me with his life, but more and more I had no idea how we were going to get out of there, or why we had come. At one point, several naked Indians stood on the shore with their blowguns and watched us pass. I wanted to ask for help, but was afraid for the boy. It was so hot and humid I was nearly delirious. The boy dozes during the worst of it. I had no memory of kidnapping him, but where did he come from? The crocodiles eyes us lazily, but they're not lazy, they're sly. I've seen them snap up

a tapir or an anteater in a flash. One mistake and you're lunch. Somewhere there's a rivertown where we can replenish our supplies, but, as it turns out, the map is unreliable. Whose boy is this? I never meant to harm him. He's beautiful but we're drifting. I have no strength. Surely he can see that. It was our destiny all along. The sun, the river, and then the night. And then nothing. "It's okay," he said, "I like being with you. We're having fun."

*Oh this is a good one. The writer—the Poet!—fooling around blindly, anxiously, within his story suddenly finds himself accompanied on the journey by a little boy who brings promise and possibility into the picture. He's ready for anything, he thinks he exists! Off the page, the writer is well aware that the Amazon—immense, inviolable—actually did exist but exists no longer having been brutalized, betrayed and dishonored beyond repair. No wonder that our hapless guide, knowing that night and nothing lie just ahead, would prefer to keep this from the trusting child.*

- Joy Williams