

Haven Poe

Shiftless on a ledge, smoking, she seems between thoughts, between lives. "How does one get so lost so soon?" I wonder, as I walk up the stairs to the youth shelter, poetry book in hand. I'm trying not to notice the girl on the ledge, emoting both defiance and need, but she speaks to me, mumbling, and I turn to see what for. "If anyone asks," she says, "I'm going to make a phone call." She jumps down and walks, dreamily, away. "Sure," I say. "Whatever." although I'm certain phone calls are not allowed here, especially those that happen down the road and out of sight, but I am no authority, stretching that sticky connection between self and the world. Inside, I learn she's looking for someone to ask her, just once, to express a desire that she not disappear into the outside downtown early spring of Tampa, trees leaning, blue bay sparkling, feet treading the brick-lined neighborhoods, looking for someone, even a stranger, to say, "Won't you come in?" "Would you like to talk or something?" And I've missed my cue, lost in my own urge to flee this place, this hurt that I cannot fix, the loneliness, the empty hearts.