

*"Who writes your name in letters of smoke
among the stars of the south?"*
—Pablo Neruda in "Every Day You Play,"
trans. W. S. Merwin

Where Pelicans Gather

We used to count them as they rose and glided.
We'd watch for a glimmer, a silver splash
that called them diving with open maws,
those bills and pouches so impossibly clumsy
yet deft and fast in hunger's eager reach
and then the low settle on pier and piling
with the sky almost always blue. We
took our time, those few winter weeks, making
salt and sand our world, your guitar, my book
of words, fresh-caught fish from Front Street
or Thursday's black beans and Cuban pork
from Fausto's on Fleming, a couple of blocks
from the conch-pink library with its low wall
perfect for sitting and strumming tunes. Hey,
remember that one Sunday morning
off-island farmers brought starfruit wine
and we bought two bottles to carry back
to wherever we slept that night? Key West:
this one-time poem is a letter to you
I'll never write and send.
Some stories disappear like miles.
Some stories never end.