

Robert Dana

SIMPLE

*In Memory of Stephen Tudor, 1933-1994
and Lawrence Pike, 1932-1995*

In the heat of the day
and a plague of house-
flies aboard. We're
barely moving on flat
water. The air, thick,
pressing. So Steve
sets the whisker pole,
and we wing-on-wing to
catch whatever breeze
there is. Not much.
Now, the waters seem
readable; the cries
of shore birds, speech;
a dragonfly, tethered
at the sheets, perfectly
still, a letter in some
Eastern alphabet aglitter
in the illiterate light.
But it's only we who doze
amid the sweet profanities
of language; the patient
spaces each word makes
to keep the day in place.
The only story told
will be the one we tell.
About how the temperature
drops suddenly, and the
north goes white; wind
like a hurricane's backspin

turning us a full three-
sixty, the tiller useless.
Larry looks like Neptune
in the stinging rain,
striking sail in the yaw
and pitch, shoving loose
gear below. The storm
jib steadies us now,
and the helm responds.
The rest of the story's
simple. No tricks. Hard
north. Well off the reef
above Grindstone City, run-
ning the troughs of twelve
foot curls, their dirty
crests breaking over
bow and gunwales. Three
hours later, our teeth
chattering with cold,
we surf home on long,
voluptuous rollers behind
Port Austin's breakwater.
The bar, My Brother's
Place, you'll love. Warm,
first flush of Daniels;
the deep-dish pizza.
And you'll stay playing
pool, late into the night,
with the Ukrainian woman
and her two teenage
daughters. And she'll love
the look in your eyes
as you tell this story.