



## Persons Unknown (Crab Orchard Series in Poetry)

*Jake Adam York*

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In this stunning continuation to the poetry collection *A Murmuration of Starlings*, dedicated to those who lost their lives during the Civil Rights movement, Jake Adam York presents another set of searing portraits of these martyrs—men whose murders haunt America’s history. These elegiac and documentary poems seek justice and understanding for such sacrifices as Mack Charles Parker, lynched in Mississippi in 1959, his body disposed of in the waters of the Pearl River; Charles Eddie Moore and Henry Hezekiah Dee, abducted into the depths of the Homochitto Forest, beaten, and drowned in the Mississippi by the Ku Klux Klan; and Medgar Evers, dedicated activist, whose assassination outside his home in 1963 sent shockwaves throughout the South. Drawing on photographs, articles, legal documents, and other cultural artifacts, York deftly weaves history and memory into a lyrical reckoning for these often-overlooked victims of the bitter struggle for Civil Rights.

## **A Natural History of Mississippi**

A blade of rust from the ocean

and from the air a rumor

that corrodes the earth in tongues,

lichen, moss, magnolia,

until each gossip’s true.

Things go this way,

each green repeating its fact

of sun and wind and rain,

its dialect, its blade,

while beneath each leaf

a quiet cuts between the veins.

Laced, pale wings open

to learn the particular weather,

the place or part of speech

that will darken

and give them a name.

So each sugar furls

to burn and bitter

against whatever mouths

might swallow,

each skin becomes

the history of its harbor,

another word for *here*.

This hatch of bark and shade

hangs like a photograph

of all it covers, so perfect,

so still, its edges

blur, then disappear.

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