

The Yellow Mayfly *Potamanthus luteus*

PETER L FREEMAN



This mayfly must have surfaced hours ago
drifting sub-imago downstream
until sails stiffened into wings
and launched her out of the shallows
on to a leaf for her final moult.

Released from her dun-self, she flexed new
limbs
and took off to find a mate
only to be waylaid by the glare
of my mercury lamp.

If she survives the night and finds her way
back to the river, she will upwing
and float down

until a male's clutch mid-air
sends her dancing over the surface,
dipping her abdomen, scattering her off-
spring.

She will settle on the water's gleaming skin,
her fuel spent, wings crumpled,
as her last eggs sink to the bottom.

But for now, she's perfectly still;
she glows like gold intricately wrought,
her four filigree wings shut, her three tails
thinner than the whorls on my finger tip.
I set her down on the grass, and switch off
the lamp.