GEORGE FOREMAN IN ZAIRE

—for Norman Mailer, who would know

JACK B. BEDELL

Achilles never showed up to a fight
to find some other half-god like Hercules
geared up and fighting for the other side.
He beat down his honorable Hectors,
stared away his wicked kings,
and piled up his laurels without equal
until he found himself lying in the grass of Troy
unable to breathe and dying,
an arrow from some coward's bow
having found his one weakness
from a hundred yards away.
Fate spared him the pain of getting up,
of living past that cold night, of age.
Staring up into a wet African sky, though,
Foreman knew he'd have to get up,
eventually, take off his gloves,
and walk past Ali raising his belt,
past a stronger man with better anger than his own.
And as much as he must have wished
for some succubus to blame
or some blueprint of fate to excuse his loss,
he had felt the worth of another man
pressed right up against his body
and had found the weight
impossible to bear. It was enough

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to take his breath away, I'm sure,
but like the rest of us, suddenly,
he lifted himself up,
and his feet found the ground.