

## LOONS

My daughter photographs loons –  
finds them in their nests, tracks them  
as they swim across lakes, knows  
when the hatchlings are due, waits  
to record first swims.

She photographs babies on the backs  
of their mothers and fathers, the same  
who dive from under them  
to emerge from the water with fry  
to put into their mouths.

I have pictures of my daughter on my back  
and of my granddaughters on her back  
and of my great-grandchildren  
on their parents' backs  
and being fed treats over shoulders.

“Up,” my children would say  
and we understood and lifted them.  
Lev Vygotsky proclaimed:  
no thought without language first  
and I think of the loons' calls.

Are the words of instruction in those yodels,  
setting the babies to think about leaping up?  
Did I grab my mother's breast without a thought?  
Did Helen Keller's first thought come on that famous day,  
or do we just not understand?

## PAS DE DEUX

The fourteen-month-old boy stands,  
one hand on the edge of the chair  
before launching himself  
toward his great-grandmother,  
who grips the edge of the kitchen counter  
before stepping out  
toward the table between them,  
one amazed at his new way of travel  
the other perplexed by hers.  
They continue to learn new steps of their minuet,  
first performed shortly after he was born.  
Early variations included slow dancing in rocking chairs,  
arm and hand motions together on a piano bench,  
these and others before the early warnings.  
Now, both vertical, the choreography calls  
for their hands to meet at the center of the room,  
an awkward couple among complacently confident dancers.  
The background music is both silent and polyphonic,  
his a Sousa-like march with flute and cymbals,  
hers a violin with slipped tuning,  
strings frayed, notes elusive,  
more and more unreachable.  
One peers gleefully into the opening out,  
the other squeezed by the relentless closing in.

## BEDAZZLED

That 'possum never had a chance,  
dazzled as she was by the beam of light,  
brightest star of her night; she,  
fading already in their thoughts  
before the warm glow of the fire.  
They sat and talked about her --  
how her eyes gave back to them  
part of the light they gave to her -- how  
each shot once, the three shots hitting her --  
how she lay, limp fur, on the ground.

So Mary, seventeen, a game girl,  
lay drunk on her father's lawn  
while the three football stars talked  
in the red glow of the Wurlitzer,  
recalling her hungry eyes, her furry gift,  
her falling into a loose heap  
when they dropped her off at home.

## SPRING OF 2001

Fifteen feet of snow and twenty below  
got the downtown caucuses talking.  
“Might not get a garden this year.”  
“Tractor tires still frozen to the ground.”  
“Old horse’ll have to eat snowballs this summer.”  
At the red store, a man at the gas pump said  
it was because of killing the rain forest.  
Another one said you can’t blame nukes  
for this one. A man at another pump said  
“Oh yes you can it’s the final tab  
for Hiroshima and Nagasaki.”

Oblivious, the croakers strained their muscles  
pushing the sluggish mud, breathing stilled,  
letting their cold skin suck muddy bubbles  
of air. All pushing at the same time,  
they sent currents to the ceiling of the pond,  
startling the ice. Like a locomotive in a roundhouse,  
the engine of winter got turned around;  
still, no one heard a sound. Suddenly,  
only two weeks behind schedule,  
the snow receding to the shadiest woods,  
the songs erupted in the pond. This year,  
along with their songs of longing,  
the frogs were bragging, raucously,  
“Wedidit, wedidit, wedidit.”  
And three days later, the peepers joined,  
“Yousee, yousee, yousee.”

## COMMUNITY

The turkeys, who have been coming in small groups  
seem to have got together last night at a meeting  
thirty of them coming into the field this morning.  
Perhaps they were considering the weather  
light frosts two nights and today ninety degrees,  
and the dozen little ones.

Who hatched these youngsters in late August  
they must have been asking, the answer  
plain to all of them and even to me  
who thought I could read embarrassment  
in the eyes of the fidgety hen and the blushing  
of an old Tom's beard.

When they hear the geese going over soon  
they might wonder about joining them  
nudged by a vestigial memory that hangs  
like a human coccyx or appendix  
with impulse to action, fit only for dreaming  
of perpetual summer.