

CROSSED WORDS

I wonder, looking at the red-headed bird at the feeder,  
if it is a woodpecker, or cardinal, or maybe a rare, hot-headed  
warbler come to dine with me on my parent's deck  
as I visit with them for a long weekend. I am picking  
over the seeds on my plate too, curious about how  
I got here, which is to say, living a thousand miles away  
and now just a rare visitor to their empty nest,  
while my convalescent mom sleeps off her dizziness  
in the back bedroom and my dad calls out to me  
from the kitchen again to ask if I'd like anything more.  
Yes, maybe to understand how migrations, digressions,  
even casual addictions can lead to the brink of confusion  
where simple questions like "what do you want to eat?"  
and "when can you visit again?" can be as complicated to answer  
as my dad's Sunday crossword, locked as I am in my own state  
of surprise, my children awaiting my return like Christmas,  
my office chair awaiting my shape, my car awaiting my key,  
my lips in search of a seven-letter word that rhymes with why.

## THE FURRIER

His years and days and hours are threaded  
and wound round the spool into the seam  
of the joined hide, pressed there, eyed, sewed up  
in a scarf or coat with a fur trim at the neckline.

He says, with a gentleman's wink,  
"This will look so WONderful on you, wear it."  
And his customers oblige him for hats, scarves,  
coats of opossum, otter or the shine of mink.

The sewing machine, branded *Never Stop*.  
His one hand over the next stitching  
until the bifocaled seams of perfection  
are set exquisitely in their proper place.

Anachronistic. Patient. Hopeful.  
The spells of time and law are against his ways.  
No apprentice now, not even his son  
will learn the trade he learned in Istanbul.  
"Take a candy," he says, and feeling more bold,  
"I will make you a scarf!" He picks off the floor  
scraps of farm-raised mink and bends to his task  
revived, unashamed, deliberate, and old.

CONFIDENCE

You know it  
when you have it in hand.  
The world. And you can become,  
without it, so small  
as to fit between  
the letters of a single word  
like if or why.

With it, you can lean casually  
upon a capital I. Too much  
and you grow so  
infinite you believe you can balance  
the Milky Way  
on the back of your fingernail.  
Without any at all,  
you will grasp  
like a child for an open hand  
and fail.

RIVERBANK

Come, walk with me along the riverbank  
with an old man & his stick, a shadow,  
and a boy whistling into an empty bottle  
that he found stuck in the soft mud.  
The river never looks the same way twice.

The rusted barges float past full of coal.  
It is late summer rising into fall. The river is life,  
is earth, is the ground note of an ancient song  
if you listen for it. Heraclitus once said:  
You cannot step into the same river twice.

Let it move you by boat, by raft, by canoe,  
by whatever means available to your luck.  
Let it carry you away, purify you, inebriate you  
with the intoxicating notes of frogs & crickets.  
No one ever crosses the same river twice.

The river is daughter & sister, life giver  
and lover of sky & bird & fish.  
The river is the blood of condensation, of fog,  
redeemer of lost ways, collector of light, a thief.  
You can never cross the same river twice.

Henry, how long since you've crossed a river?  
Artery of disarray, spare parts, rusted cans,  
of sandstone, storm-tossed limbs, driftwood,  
marshes and grasses, cache of wildflowers: this river  
never says my name the same way twice.