

Currents

The female beaver readies her den
as she feels new life stir.

Soon, kits will arrive:

older offspring must go.

No room for them in the beaver dam.

Not enough food, and they
are rebuked and rebuffed.

Once nurturing parents now claw
and tear, bare sharp teeth.

The young cringe and submit.

Confused, frightened, and
cast out into the gentle river.

Here, dappled sunlight welcomes them.

Here, they must swim downstream.

One young male coasts underwater,
skims silt and water plants.

Sleek fur undulates as he pushes
one webbed foot back, and then the other
bicycling through this dreamy waterscape.

His rotund mass freed from gravity,
effortlessly glides beneath lonely waters
where minnows dart, and herons fish.
Above water, he digs, constructs his pond,
works through the night while a female floats
down the river, following his scent,
finding her home and her mate for life.

Tunnels worm through hidden depths.
Moonlight illuminates dark silhouettes
piling branches against stones.
Beavers fortify their lodge, deepen the pool,
create a world where their wild hearts
can enter these black waters.

Dog-Paddling

My mother dog-paddles through words
searching for the end of a sentence.
She sinks in muddy waters,
she sinks to the bottom of this gray pond --
hair streams like Ophelia's,
hands grasp seaweed,
her curved feet touch soft muck:
fish fly every which way.

I stand on shore and call out,
but I know she doesn't hear.
She reaches for words in the dark water,
and watches them float away.
Names bounce off her fingers, memories
retreat into empty shells.
She stops and waits, waits
at the bottom of the pond.

I want to give my mother pearls, water lilies,
daylight, birdsong.
I want to hear my mother
speak my name.
I tell myself she is not lost, that I carry her
in my cells, the shape of my mouth,
but I do not have the words
to summon her back to me.

The White Hen

Atilt, a sort of white sailboat tipped askew

the hen propels her bulk.

Claws tear through dry leaves, wings raised,

she imagines flight and trundles toward her coop

senses the circling hawk's shadow, feels

gleaming reptilian eyes target the soft curve of her neck:

the place where talons sever heads.

She hurries, my hen, July sun on her feathers.

Nothing more important than the nesting bin,

where there are no predators, only

lovely moon-shaped eggs waiting for her warmth.

I hold my breath as she runs. I can no more

stop the hawk than stay lightning,

but she reaches the coop, and I know,

without looking, she has planted herself atop eggs

head first, tail feathers protruding in a bouquet.

The hawk circles in the sky.

One less death in a world that wears us out,

the hen's victory a small joy to relish.

I return to the house, my own nesting bin.

Somewhere there are lovely moon-shaped eggs.

