

To Swim

Dear water, I loved you best
back then—my upside-down
house, kinder than sidewalks
or too-high branches, the bent red bike
that tipped me to the street.
Blue more blue and the quiet
more quiet, where I could be
the anhingas I'd seen, floating and diving,
there & gone & there,
swift as fists or Sunday school angels
parting the clouds of heaven.
I learned because my mother was afraid,
knew canals and pools, the eager sea
as so many places a child
could drown. I learned
because she loved me, and I fell
like Alice into somewhere else,
my feet leaving tiles or a motorboat's side
to ride on almost nothing. Because she was
afraid I called myself
a bird, a fish, and because
she loved me I tried
to be a boat, and grew myself
to fear and love until they
became like children, mine, twins
who looked so much alike
I could hardly tell them apart
or ever hold them close enough.

Two Owls

One an outline: simplest
shape, same dark
as the barn roof, and the horizon
I wanted to walk toward
and not stop.

Much later, the second, among
trees. A quickness,
wordless at first,
from the corner of my eye,
as everything huge arrives
without a name; then
the easy noises I called back,
a child's lexicon: big, brown,
strong. Almost

not there, gone so fast, wings
outside and in—the shocked velvet
of woods pulled over my head
like the blanket you spread
across me, our first weekend
away from school and drunk.
I fell into the haze of wine
like falling from the barn's peaked hill
of hay, that itch I'd carry
all day beneath my clothes—
straw-slivers and the welter
of stars where nettles
slapped my calves. A child's

lexicon: love, I, you.

Under knitted squares, the feather and hush
of different skin, I slept until you spoke
and woke me. Almost not there, gone
so fast: your voice, my first face.

Race Track, Hialeah, FL

I slipped my arms into a dress of fog
and the whole unbroken summer
opened to let me in: those mornings
my mother drove back streets
so we could see them: before heat
and crowds and bets
when clouds leaned close
but didn't speak, we leaned
on railings to watch the horses practice,
orbiting the track's green center,
its far-off oval of flamingos & palms
like the place on paper
where, years later, I'd set
my compass tip, careful
to make my circles *concentric*,
meaning they shared a heart.
Horses' hearts are huge,
their legs impossibly skinny.
At home I traced their shapes
from books, pressed so hard
my pencil left a moat around each photo,
a hollow that held them safe.
I trusted tile roofs and Banyan roots
dropping from each branch,
like the rope of the tire swing
that left me dizzy, spinning
between dirt and sky. All around, my city
spiraled out, coils of clay

widening a bowl to hold
the impossible things I was learning
to believe—how roots
could grow in air, or two lines
reach endlessly
and never touch. Even after
the horses left for other tracks,
swaying in the dark of trucks
with the highway's white line
licking always ahead, ticking
like August under my skin,
I curled in my swing, looped
my pencil around withers, pastern,
hooves, I leaned back
until my hair swept ground,
until the ground was sky,
asking roots and leaves,
our house, the horses, asking
all of it to remember me.