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JOHN BENSKO

The Water Shrew

Night is when you put your feet on water,
when the fringe of hairs
along the toes

presses gently. The surface does not break
but dimples, and you pass forward
instead of going down.

Not that going down is bad.
On the muddy bottom, you root for larvae
where smell and touch defy your tender eyes.

Nor that going forward is nice—
although we might slow
it down, examine

how the claws lift delicately
to preserve the surface,
and how each leg

will bounce on the spring of tension
off the water like a child
enjoying the first

pulse of a trampoline.
No. Not so nice. Swift, too swift,
or not swift enough—

ahead of the owl whose flight is known
by hearing, that sudden beat,
then the silence

of the glide—ahead of the weasel
whose quick slither through
the grass

breaks into you stronger
than the teeth
of sunlight.

The running across water in fear,
how long does it take,
how far

can you go? The span of a human
arm? The length
of a leg?