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JENNY KERN

When We Leave

The homeland is under water. Bad planning
Some say, but who plans this?
Houses are drifting up against the Cedar Rapids
Bridge across the Iowa River like empty cigarette
Packs in a catch current swirl against a dead branch,
Gently collapsing in on each other as the next comes along.

The water will not stop. The livestock we didn't save
Eventually swam or drifted to higher ground. On an
Island of mud, surrounded by overflow and the ones
Who couldn't swim floating downstream, or in circles,
The animals who could swim died a slow sunburn
Of a death, their minds in flutter.
We watch, doing and doing and doing, and not able to do.

We sink here, finding a deep and weedy spot
Under the current, among slippery rocks
And when the water recedes we flutter
Out to dry, having been able to breathe almost
The whole time, due to each other
And our ability to take in oxygen, each for the other.

Now is the mud. The up-to-our-knees mud, drying
Cracking flatbed mud. Still sinking in some spots,
We find them as we move
On and away.

The water still all around us is
Still and housing mosquitoes so we must
Leave it at least for something that moves
Before another kind of life starts growing
Out of it.

We are afraid we planned badly. We didn't
Even want to plan. We didn't plan. But we're still
Trying, even now. The plan covers any possible
Fear. We leave *because* we're planning. We
Can't stop planning over what's happening.
We're not sure what's happening.

So we leave, scared of moving on and missing
The home and the land that is now mud.
Out of practicality we leave, because something
Caused this flood, some bad planning perhaps, or
Perhaps no planning at all. Or perhaps
We loved our way through it
And are still loving even now