At Cedar River

Jennifer Atkinson
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— after Ono no Komachi

My body floats below the surface like duckweed severed at the roots green as though alive. If there were a current to convince me I would follow its logic down, I think, but now no water asks no stream suggests I come away. Once I was pure as blue or wild iris in April. When I bathed the water ran its hands along my sides; it gently tugged my hair.

In October a flock of mallards, a grove of ginkgo trees—their fanned leaves let go and will-less fall under the power and pull of the river—a cluster of coriopsis flowers, blackened and limp with the first light frost. Such pretty words, like cold, will change the sense and look of things.

My blue cotton skirt clings to my wet thighs like sorrow, it seems now. We’d have called it something different then, if we’d bothered with words at all. Nightfall and in the blue dusk, the mallards find a place no currents touch, and bob on the quiet dark surface, waiting for still another morning.