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Falling South

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Falling South · Martha Boethel

Gunshot, or a pin oak falling; I still
can’t tell. I know only
a few things: the river rises, swilling
sand from old roots; mosquitoes
and crawfish breed in the bar ditches.
Tin cans on the fence
spook jackrabbits, crows, but not
hunters. My cousin from the highway
department puts up our mailbox—but who
pulls it down, snaps the flag, upturns it
on the road like a dead armadillo?

“You two don’t belong,” my mother
declares. “Women only come here
on family day.” (In a dream,
someone strings barbed wire
between me and the tank. When the snake
circles back, I hang my feet
on the wire, for safety.)

Thanksgiving: surrounded. We see deer
flee the pasture, turn, turn again. Ribbons
of geese in the sky; gunshot. We eat
mutton, turkey, deploring the slaughter.
At dusk owls call; geese
squawk, roll in formation like DNA.
One white crane on the rideaway.

The truth is, I can’t live here. The stars,
geese, press down; their wings . . .
The truth is, I always lived here.
Caretaker; axe; crane
in the bar ditch, gulping crawfish. Drank
from both mugs, “Pop” and “Mom.”
Now the ghosts of family days, old
hunters, move the constellations
too near. I can’t look at the night;
it’s all so close, and falling.