

**A Great Egret Stands in a Puddle off the Highway**

The hills of orange  
dirt—mounted high  
beside the road—  
are ironed flat

by the heat of the sun.  
Each grain is fused  
to the next—  
simmered and stilled  
into a sheet.

I don't call it  
a puddle. The water  
is too turbid  
to see the white sheen  
and hazy lines  
of reflected tree branches  
and unkempt leaves.

I only acknowledge it  
as possibly-water  
because the great egret  
stands on needle legs  
and lifts high  
on its outstretched neck  
the word *puddle*,

its white body  
an attempted sheen  
across the water;  
the shadows of the trees  
along its oval back  
an attempted reflection.

If I'd called  
the ironed earth  
a puddle, I think  
it would honor  
the great egret,

but I remember the river  
behind the trees. I imagine  
the great egret reaching  
above the white froth,  
its feathers darkening  
with spray.

## **I Pretend, a Crab Shell, No End**

The cavities, the eye  
sockets, now translucent,  
catching light, are illuminated  
yellow and from the underside  
curve like sacs. I try  
to see them as the eyes—  
renewed and aglow,  
turned within, inverted  
by death; but the cavities  
remain marled sacs,  
their dark shapes the shadows  
of the unhatched.

I'm glad that I can't see  
the sockets as eyes,  
that I never saw the crab's  
true eyes, or let the crab see me.  
If I had, I could not hold  
the shell between my fingers  
like a spit over flame.

This is to say, it is beautiful  
to live when the crab did not,  
and to watch the unhatched  
spiders within the carapace,  
their mother's webbing  
stitching the shell together  
in tidy columns.

So I tell myself,  
for comfort,  
that the great egret  
does not stand  
in a puddle.  
It stands  
in a phenomenon  
of nature: land stilled,  
ironed, manufactured.

I watch as the barricades  
beside the highway  
wash over the great egret.  
The car I am within  
slides past.

And, unfaithful to honor,  
in truth I do not see  
the white glare of its body  
slide across the water.  
It is not formed  
from my eyes and sun  
and land. Instead, its crown  
and the orange of its beak  
drops out of view.

**Brother of the Sixth Swan, Working in a Sushi Restaurant**

My brother ladles soup into the dishes, one-handed, waterfalls tapering into the porcelain. He sinks the ladle back into broth. The wood disappears. The next bowl is filled. His movements are slow but mostly unambiguous. Which is to be easy on the eyes. White body, dark face. Orange lips, like how I coax feathers into carrot-wings with steady hands and a razor. Peppercorns nestled into divots for the eyes, even our scleras black. Our heads a fishhook. My brother sometimes wakes with his left wing thrashing and crushed beneath him. The bed unmade and scattered with plucked feathers, nearly the aftermath of a different story. He argues with me, says his body is the sheet where two minds cramp into one. That his story is one-sentence long which is shorter than the span of his wing. We finish plating the fish, each stack nested in sesame leaves, oils glistening. Salmon curls into the orange center. But nothing represents the nettles except fish laid in long lines, thin petals.