

THE RETRIEVAL

To picture that day,
you have to stand above your own sleep
until you are only a shadow
that falls across a table,
the nearly-drowned they're getting ready
to pull out of the deep.
Sometimes you go back
to that shock of pinkish-gray
in a jar on the vet's shelf
or for the shape
you conjure up a hybrid form
that someone holds mid-air,
a cross between a valentine
and some hot-water bottle
that's not quite full, that you imagine
lukewarm to the touch and flopping slightly
in those upturned palms.
Then suddenly—
as if you opened your eyes
when the gloved hands lifted it out of you
and someone else poured ice water
into the red basin of your chest—
there's a moment
when, like sugar sprinkled onto frothy milk,
it sits lightly on your mind
before it sinks.