

BOYD WHITE

Cabin John

Vultures flay the flesh off a crushed doe some careless
driver's rush has kicked onto a stretch of lawn
outside another gated community taken root
by the river. Teeming with a life of their own,
black wings ripple like dark water as blood trickles onto the
remaining
snow. An occasional scarlet spray blooms a stern warning
across golden letters that read *Private Drive*.
Once the unnamed poor thrived along these banks,
canal people descended from the workers
who cleaned the locks and controlled the flooding,
dredging their livings from the nation's capital,
families as quiet and reserved as the mules that pulled
barges up the towpath and ensured the country's trade.
Otters slide their fat bellies across the frozen canal
like well-fed children enjoying a snow day from school.
I rub my hands vigorously against the cold.
By now the vultures have receded into their own dark country,
and the deer's ribs cradle an empty sky
while a few chimneys near the Potomac scatter soot
across the snow slowly disappearing
like the footprints of the dead.