

Mark Doty

WHITE POURING

I was a swan,
and I slept in the reeds
by the highway,
by way of kind; ours,

pond's edge, always,
our narrow crescent
where liquid silver's
broken (both sky

and water pour)
by long strokes
of grasses. A chilly,
recalcitrant spring,

and oh, they were the world's
capitol, the high wet plumes,
they were the morning
and evening fixed between

seed-littered heavens.
A swan's questions:
who feeds on the kindled
seeds of the sky?

Whose feathers drifted
across the firmament
in a white highway
more steady than

your pouring hurry?
Our night place, still,
though the light-path
roars and headlamps fret

the tall grasses.
Unnumbered Aprils
—even if we counted
we could not measure—

we were held in
that sweet expanse, and bent
ourselves to form
on the waters symmetries

a swan doesn't need
or know, though I knew
in my long body,
from my heavy center

to the extravagance of neck
and the twin creakings
at either shoulder
—imagine wearing something

that opens furiously
out onto the world,
a body of opportunities
to touch . . .

Doubles for the wing
winter wrapped around us,
always. Then,
in the new months,

eggs shone in moonlight,
little domes rising
from the reedy nests,
versions of the vault

of heaven. It is not
you understand
in the nature of swans
to regret, but if it were

what I would miss
is the long unbroken
body of the dream,
giving ourselves

to it, how we were one
wing and water, one silver
unfurling from the white
womb-chamber of the shell

to pond to air's fierce music
to sleeping bent-necked
over the treasury of the future
again . . . But there, I speak

in human terms—
how else would you allow me
to frame the discussion?
We had no future,

simply the pour.
And now, in your sense,
we have no future again.
Not in our nature

to lament; I sleep here,
in the chill shine
and am what I always was:
attention, a swirl of action

around a cluster of—terms,
really, at our common core:
hungry, white, eggs,
grass. Snow stays late,

the sky untunes
a harsher music.
Where are you hurrying,
in your cold metal?

The legend's passed.
Do you understand?
The beautiful kingdom is over.