

ROBERT STEWART

Clues to a Drowning

A thunderhead blocked the river
canyon to the south. A sign
on a tree arranged the large mouth,
striped, and the small mouth,
according to what should not be taken.
The woman I know sat in a ripple,
her legs spread as if to issue
the river's own flesh. She said,
Unto everything there is time.
So we held our arms to the sky,
holding back an end to the trip.
A police car hung on the lip
of the campground, and older folks
hung around at the bank—two sitting
at a picnic table, three standing,
as if the natural bait of their hysteria
had played out on a kind of string.
Rich, of Rich's Last Resort, walked
toward us, hands out, and said,
We had a drowning, but talked so
I thought he meant that morning,
not something I could have stopped.
In that dumb way we strayed
up close and thought it normal to see
those grandmas and grandpas
shocked by currents, eddies, and wind.
On a day we had commanded to be mild,
my friend asked for a blessing, and I gave it.
She said, *Tell me it wasn't a child.*
What a fate—to stand later on a bluff
and watch the meandering river take,
among the stones, that narrow way.