

Falling South · *Martha Boethel*

Gunshot, or a pin oak falling; I still
can't tell. I know only
a few things: the river rises, swilling
sand from old roots; mosquitoes
and crawfish breed in the bar ditches.
Tin cans on the fence
spook jackrabbits, crows, but not
hunters. My cousin from the highway
department puts up our mailbox — but who
pulls it down, snaps the flag, upturns it
on the road like a dead armadillo?

“You two don't belong,” my mother
declares. “Women only come here
on family day.” (In a dream,
someone strings barbwire
between me and the tank. When the snake
circles back, I hang my feet
on the wire, for safety.)

Thanksgiving: surrounded. We see deer
flee the pasture, turn, turn again. Ribbons
of geese in the sky; gunshot. We eat
mutton, turkey, deploring the slaughter.
At dusk owls call; geese
squawk, roll in formation like DNA.
One white crane on the rideaway.

The truth is, I can't live here. The stars,
geese, press down; their wings . . .

The truth is, I always lived here.
Caretaker; axe; crane
in the bar ditch, gulping crawfish. Drank
from both mugs, "Pop" and "Mom."
Now the ghosts of family days, old
hunters, move the constellations
too near. I can't look at the night;
it's all so close, and falling.