

TAR RIVER TAXONOMY

Your body held so much of me, more home  
than the house you ran alongside, the one maroon wall

we painted, the panes of glass quieting your tempers  
as we watched you fatten with storm, more refuge

than any mortar nest. When was our last moment?  
Was it the time I'd gone down to see which trees

they'd torn from your banks, which  
neighborhood beagles survived, lapping

your mucky edges? Maybe it was before the handoff  
when I dragged the kayak over for a final wet swaddle,

the sand a particular grit I've never found again:  
not fine but thick, grains matted into one being.

I dodged the cypress knees, tracked the osprey,  
egret, occasional gull. Something smelled like blood.

A cycle of becomings. Your acrid scent, half gone  
sunfish, half skin-soft driftwood, rotting, half spoiled

quahog. Soaking the swamp I waded through barefoot,  
the tangled underbrush netting herself into a womb

for me to hide in, splitting ham sandwiches  
with white bread and Miracle Whip, that awful fraud.

Bay of quicksand, ghosted blueprint where H swore  
she saw the deer go down, the dusty road along your bank

where we rolled the golf cart over that rattlesnake  
and heard its maraca alarm. At the end of each wobbly pier

we watched you swallow God up every time.

Let me see you again, muddy footed on your bank

to catch the pod of dolphins who got lost  
that spring Sunday, tried to smell their way home

to the delta, swimming upstream as they weaved  
in and out of you, the gleam of your skin

on their skin. O wreck and savior, I pushed the dog in  
and didn't flinch at my swelling violence. Yes,

the house's rotting bottom. Yes, the downed trees  
blocking the only road out. That swing set you rose up

to pluck from someone else's yard, our borrowed joy  
after the storm. You were everywhere. Even there,

by the inlet, in the barn that midwifed all those kittens,  
bursting open. Those drowned trunks at the bottom,

gruesome stench of new life, how you held death  
in your same reeking mouth. I'm still taking notes.