

April Lindner

Giant River Otters

Out of zest or sheer showoffery
these pleasers romp all afternoon
the only animals awake
in August's acrid heat. They ping

against the bumpers of their pit
and tumble, clamber, undulant as eels.
Their work is sport, their element
this manmade reeking river.

A torrent of them spill over the waterfall.
Children scream with joy,
and they shriek back. At mealtime,
silver fish rain from the sky.

A brief frenzy of snarls and snapping jaws-
gets sorted out with one herring apiece.
One hugs his fish and gnaws it,
eyes closed to slits. Another finds a morsel

of sardine gut floating past
and fingers it before he laps it up.
Another hurls himself into a dive,
so much more graceful than his separate parts —

his stumpy flippers and sleek black skull,
thick hips and tiny ears, slippery pelt
and bristly whiskers, his flatly thwacking tail.

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Operation Secure Streets

This summer they're stationed
on every street corner, guarding
churches, fountains, embassies,
young men and an occasional woman
in camo, combat boots, berets.
L'Operazione Strade Sicure.

When I take a wrong turn
one hurries up to warn me
I'm headed for trouble.
Voice gentle, he calls me
Signora, wants not to alarm me
but he cradles an automatic.

I grope for words and, flustered,
mime my innocence. Satisfied
that I can be no threat he says
I must *Fare un giro*,
and watches me comply.

Meanwhile back in the United States
a driver pulls to the curb,
and in the pulsing red and blue
reaches for license and registration.
He looks the part of a wanted man
and all his care is still not care enough.

It's Beautiful, Like Birth,

The hospice lady cooed
You'll see him growing purer, turning inward . . .
His flesh readying to be shed.

I pictured a white candle
liberated from its shape,
loosening to liquid
in service of a shuddering flame.

Beyond the picture window
Florida trembled, glistening
like shattered crystal.

A parade of women climbed the stairs
bearing washbasins and swabs,
salve for his lips, atropine,
a bed that breathed
like an accordion

and morphine in its amber vial,
blue drops from which he strained away,
that burned beneath his tongue.

Behind his back, I went to see the mortician,
slipped him folded bills
from Mother's careful stash.
Unbeautiful: the catheter
he fought against, urine
browning in its bag

and his accusation, unforeseen:
Are you going to leave me here to die?

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Yes, you will die
here in this borrowed bed
in front of the t.v.
The Westminster dog show
Oh, that dog is beautiful.
A playoff game against the green field
Oh, that baseball player's beautiful.

Not beautiful, but not unbearable,
the work that kept us from imagining
so much blue future emptied of you,

thinking of the right response too late:

*No, Father, no, Daddy, no
we will never leave you.*