

Dreaming Ophelia

by Angela Zito

Floating between banks, mallard hens call *home*
to chicks roaming the Kalamazoo, swollen
in springtime. Little girls race dandelions
and forget-me-nots near The Forks, where they
bob, drown, resurface in the turbulence
of rapids in separation—where north
and south branches lose touch with each other
as one splits town and one runs by First
United. But I know that branch paces
in the woods, impatiently, like women
in town pace waiting for husbands, boyfriends,
sons, fathers, brothers, someone to fix
the crack that's been in the Buick's windshield
to call *come home* to leave for good.

*

We had to leave at mom's call to come home.

North twenty miles, she took a back road alone.

We fought over music. Settled for radio.

As the last track finished, she hit eject.

My brother drove (going only ten over).

She filed the disc while coasting through a yellow.

He moved the rear-view to look at the storm.

She turned on the wipers, found a new CD.

I said, "It's probably raining in Clarkston,"

Her two-door slid, hissed, became a hydro-plane.

and I watched the sunset scarlet gray clouds.

Three youngish trees, the guardrail, her neck: snapped.

God, I'd never seen such a violet red.

Somewhere her father said, "No, she's not home."

*

No I said *Home* somewhere between the bar
and his apartment, but the cabbie didn't
hear me over his breathing on my neck—
warm tides of bottled ego imbibed
before the cab ride now inundate lips,
mouth, tongue motioning wildly for air
after he knocked the wind out of me
tackling me onto the bed, sweaty
fingers tearing dress down from pale breasts
rising and falling in strange darkness
that feels like water, kicking with heels on
and drowning under his heavier body—windless
in the Windy City—unromantic
tragedy I once saw on television.

*

I once saw on television a real
non-miracle: *Basiliscus plumifrons*
ran across the water's surface with wildly
beating limbs, reached the other side as if
it never left land.

The Jesus Christ Lizard.

Believers in miracles misunderstand
the tension beneath its feet, ten thousand
hydrogen bonds rallying at the moment
of impact.

Once, my father cried on my shoulder.

Without warning — *Jesus* — in the kitchen
his dihydrogen oxide beat atoms
of anguish across the surface of my skin.

And my molecules maintained their bonds, buoyed
my father from one side to the other.

*

From one side to the other, our father
laughed as we paddled across the Au Sable.
He sat behind my brother and me, steering
the vessel I couldn't help but think *waterlogged*.
Our mother sat at the bow, her back to us
stiff against her children's clumsy strokes
battling the current. There in the middle,
between his too-easy laugh and her silence,
I could see my mother's face in profile
watching wry water slip beneath the canoe
as if watching a bathtub drain empty.
I thought to tip the boat. Maybe then she'd speak
scream or sing. Maybe then her lips would part
that missed the chance to have said *I'm leaving*.

*

I missed the call that would have said *Gina*
died in a car crash last night. Instead,
I found it on the answering machine
after my grandma's coo: *Just want to say hi*.
Two calls confirmed that teenagers could die
and a third secured me a ride out
of this house I could not find God in, though
I dented deep through the drywall looking.
South, drive south. Away from where her widowed,
daughterless father grieved; He was down here,

near the Pontiac Silverdome where clouds
pelted pavement a darker gray. I stopped, ran,
kicked, splashed, knelt, cried against faithless thunder
bare-kneed somewhere beneath the dome's lighting.

*

Somewhere below bare knee islands I've lost
my hands and feet in tepid bathwater.
Couldn't recall them to action if I

wanted to. But I don't. Eyes closed,
I sing giddy, grieving ditties with no tune
to myself and the ghosts within me:

*They bore me barefaced on the bier,
Hey non nonny, nonny, hey nonny.*

I dream myself Ophelia, clothed in flowers
and madness, drifting in this river clogged
with dandelions, thoughts and remembrance,

singing (*Dear Lord*) we know what we are, but
not what we may be. Till heavy with drink,
I'll call this *home* : floating between banks.