**Naiad**

Fannie H. Gray

Inside me there is a river. Perhaps my mother swallowed too much sadness; perhaps there were two of us swimming within her, and after one drowned, the water swelled, slithering into me. Who knows how these things happen?

Recently, a coughing fit dredged up silt and muck, bones, and teeth. There is always so much more in a river than what you think. I have tried to mitigate it in some way, swallow enough bread or sand, but the water only rises. I no longer sleep upon my back; I would drown.

August is the worst month. Around me, the air becomes waterlogged. I do not perspire but even the slightest touch leaves a dimple of wetness, like when you push upon a sponge forgotten in the sink. I cannot live within plaster walls. Too soon, the black crawls up, etching and fanning like coral, like brachia. Wood is not much better, too porous. Brick mosses and ferns.

Winter can be cruel. The occasional cold snap will wreak havoc throughout me; my veins are icy splinters and moving takes herculean effort.

It is too tiring being altered by the moon and the seasons. Once, I thought I could leave this place and stifle the source. I nearly died in a drier climate, my skin paper to the touch.

A short while back, I met a man who told me he could see all that was dammed within me. I took his hands and pressed them to my eyes. So much spilled out from me then, he fled, terrified that I would inundate him.

I long to complete, to belong, the way the Mississippi barrels with all her strength to meet the Gulf. She is being called home.

I stand now by the retention pond, my whole being seeping, yearning when a blush blossom catches my eye. I summon up my height, and bend from my waist, wavering like a heron, poised to strike; I take the lotus whole. I feel the green of it as I take it down into my watery depth, the vegetal tang as its fibrous parts soak within me. As I hover over the water, baited like a fish upon the lotus, this is when I hear the song; tadpoles and newts thrumming, newly sprouted legs whisking through water; fish gliding, silver scales sluicing ripples; all the aquatic plants dancing upon the surface while below their tentacled roots ebb and flow. All these in chorus, beckoning me, *let down your load.* At last, as I plunge into my new home, everything is so much clearer beneath the surface.