**A Boy, Lost at Swim**

Tom Boswell

I didn’t see it. I wasn’t there.

My son saw it.

A boy. He was the furthest

out, but still not too far.

Not past the furthest sandbar.

Just far enough to feel free,

flying on top the waves.

I may have met the boy

last summer or the one before.

Out in the sloughs.

He must have been the bravest

of the lot,

or most foolhardy.

Swept up by the thrill of crashing

into a cold curtain of water

as if there was no tomorrow.

There were small craft warnings.

My son said the waves

were eight feet tall.

But now, two weeks later,

it is still.

Placid, peaceful.

Even the bear that strolled

through my campsite yesterday evening

did not seem cause for concern.

The sun sets so swiftly,

so bittersweet,

over the lake and islands,

a pastiche of pastel hues—

reds oranges pinks purples

blues—this world drenched

with both beauty and grief.

He was a native youth, just 15.

He probably knew the island well

but not well enough to know

what the water can do on this largest

of freshwater lakes in the world.

It must have been a rip current

that pulled him out,

caused him to panic.

Ripped him from his life

like a page from a book.

All along the trail to the beach,

tall hemlocks ripped out at the roots

by the summer storms,

prostrate on the ground like carcasses

of prehistoric sea creatures.

But blueberries still bloom.

Maiden fern and carpet of wintergreen.

Then, by the bog, more blueberries,

leatherleaf and Labrador tea.

Yellow waterlily and pitcher plants

by the little wooden bridge.

The doctor advised me not to come.

I flunked my stress test.

My heart needs help

but here is where I need to be.

More woods now, then across

the boardwalk to the rocks:

the shore, soft sand, herring gulls,

the lake await me.

My son said time stopped

when he saw the boy go under

but I’m sure it only took seconds

for this cold swollen lake

to swallow him up.

I slip into my trunks

and ask myself: is death a quiet

or a turbulent thing? Does the spirit

fly free and full of bliss

when we leave the weary body behind?

When I was young, I was

a timid child, especially near water.

Two weeks ago I would have stayed

on shore, but yes, I’m going in.

No longer timid but not rash

either and in this way

I’ve managed to grow old.

My son would have gone in

after him but someone

pulled him back.

I want to tell him

*don’t save me,*

*spare me that*.

Before I had this boy, before

I met his mother,

I dreamt of him. Dreamt

we were both flying

with black-ribbed wings,

soaring like bats in blind delight

above a raging sea.

Arabs have a word for it:

*Ya’aburnee*, you bury me.

Let me die first.

Bury me here on this blessed beach

or in the bog. Oh,

that won’t work. Perhaps

the woods will have to do.

Next time, when we come here together,

there’s a spot there I can show you.