## Blood Sugar

During the primaveral season,

our sugar maples share

a gift of sugar-water, which appears

mere magic from the veins

of this place but is actually

a mystic bundled process of

chemistry and physics.

Last summer, these maples converted

sun to sucrose as

we humans convert language

to song.

Once their autumn leaves tumbled

to forest’s floor, all residual sap

was warehoused in each tree’s rays,

harbored till spring’s revival.

Then during the freeze-thaw

cycle, when nights plummet

but days offer

warm spring winds,

we trudge knee-deep snow to drill

two inches into each maple.

We hammer till spouts hold tight

into acer wood.

We festoon buckets from each spout.

During this freeze-thaw cycle,

internal pressure forces sap

from sapwood.

Plunk plunk plunk—sap tumbles

into ancient galvanized buckets.

A song of reawakened woods,

a herald to soon-to-return songbirds.

A drop at a time, sugar water

gathers in buckets, we pray

toward overflow.

A drop at a time,

yawping out in their own language.

Each afternoon, when chilled weather

leads to suction and silence,

it is then that we heave

sap water to our deck, ignite

our propane stove, and place

buckets above fire.

Soon, pots share up steam to an evening air,

a gift to cold nights.

Over the burn, nature’s divinity

turns forty gallons of maple sap

into one gallon of syrup.

As dusk soaks the sky,

as Solstice Mountain dims, we dip

spoons into the boil

to taste what blood-sugar

our trees provide,

and it tastes of earth, of sweet,

of tree, of roots sunk

deep within the soil

of home.

## Conception of March

For unborn Acorn.

Those monogamous screech owls

perch beside each other on

pine branches. The male performing

an elaborate dance—a lifting of wings, a prostration

before her, a bringing of food. The female, too,

dances—jumping and bowing

again, again.

A ruffed grouse drums air beneath

his wings, reverberating a percussion

through our woods, a music to a mate.

From the branches

of our alders, mourning

doves coo to forever partners.

The male returns

to the female with alms of

grass, needles, bits of branches.

The female constructs

a nest where together they will perch

upon eggs.

The brown slink and hop

of the male mink travels far to reach

Solstice Lake females.

Maybe, Sarah, we will spot their tracks

in the lake’s muddy shoreline. Let us

lean in close

and examine the prints. Let us gaze

to the branches of the trees

to learn from this coupling

world around us.

March is a season of nesting,

of conception.

We, too, are animals. We, too,

must use this season

to create.

Let us too court.

I will fetch you morning tea.

You may lounge your sleepy head upon

my shoulder. I will lose

my fingers into your wilderness

of hair.

## Skies Alive

These skies were once so muted—

hosting little more than

snow squalls—that we forgot

to even stare

off into its blue apron. But before

even the last patches

of snow have retreated, our March

heavens shatter open

to robins returning to empty airs,

scavenge mountain ash berries.

As soon as the marsh fissures

open from ice, sweet gale

branches bend beneath

red-winged blackbirds

that serenade us with a harsh

*Konk la re Konk la re.*

Upon the air, drunken in flight, the naked

head of the wobbly-winged

turkey vulture, nosing toward winter’s

last decay.

Acrobatic fly catching tree swallows—

shimmering blue—

surf an invisible wind.

And, as if dressed to wail away

the abandoning winter,

mourning cloak butterflies

arise—as if birthed

—from snow itself—

to take to lazy spring flight.

## Song of Failure

The ice has given up the edge of Turtle Cove enough

so we slide in the canoe—*Too early*, everyone

else might say—and paddle cove’s edge.

Just enough space for canoe and paddle, we travel

into the big lake—nestled between Beaver Lodge

and Kingfisher Points, till ice halts us.

We gaze at a world bridging winter and spring,

part water, part ice—a straddling season.

Off in another iced-out spot, one of us spies a ripple,

catches a glimpse of a beaver’s head,

out hunting spring’s bark.

This beaver dives beneath water, a good hundred yard

Away and swims beneath a thin veneer

of ice toward our swath of open water.

This beaver’s shallow swim fractures ice, sending

the song of ice’s failure toward us.

Beavers can swim beneath water—or, today, ice—

or half a mile; they use up seventy-five

percent of the oxygen they inhale

(our inefficient breaths use only fifteen percent).

Though it cannot see us—vision blocked by ice

—this beaver ventures closer and closer

to our canoe till the beaver breaks free

into our narrow pool of water.

Just five feet from our canoe, its head shatters

the water, and it stares right at canoe.

And do I imagine this or do we see its eyes dilate

in terror as it glimpses canoe and humans?

The beaver slaps its tail onto water and dives toward

the safety of its nearby lodge, leaving us

—on this April morning—bathing in

a beaver’s spring shower.

## Wintertime Naps II

Most birds have long since fled far south. Frogs, toads, and salamanders hibernate within the earth’s mud. Snakes, lizards, and salamanders have fallen into brumation, chipmunks, turtles, and bats toward hibernate. To those of us who live in homes with curled smoke billowing from stove pipes, it seems every species but us is asleep or disappeared till March. But some remain. Like us during winter, rarely seen. Mice, voles, and shrews scurry beneath snow. Hares bound from cover to cover, hoping to keep from the killing eyes of owl. Squirrels skitter across snow, trying to resemble a bounding mink as it porpoises through winter. The beavers, hidden, but still awake, cozy in their lodge. The mink, fisher, otter, fox, deer, and all the rest too. Gazing through frosted window toward that outer world, a mug of tea mirroring our stovepipe, I startle to realize that there is a difference between slumber and stillness. A difference between nothing and the appearance of nothing.