The Hidden Places

A robin makes her nest in the wreath on our front door.

The mailman discovers the speckled eggs,
bending his bad back sideways to peer at them.

Tender in a way I hadn’t expected.

Two weeks later the babies appear overnight
nut-brown and sticky and wailing
still shaking off pieces of shell and stars.

I lie on the other side of the door,
my ear pressed to the cool wood
listening to the thump and murmur of new life.

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In the morning,

I walk to the edge of the pond.

I slip off my socks, and my white winter toes
blink in the light.
The littlest fish with gaping yellow mouths
are glad to see me–
my pinky toe is a wonder of the world!
I am the spectacle of the sandy bottom!
Out of the corner of my eye
under the branches that cluster by the shore
I see the sleek stony back of something slide under the surface
and sink sighing into the dark.
Into water too deep
for me to follow.

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One night,
I hear the singing
friendly and low
of the owl that lives in the trees nearby.
I imagine he is warm
and full of meat.
I imagine he hums to himself
and bats his enormous eyes.
Abruptly, the fur on my dog’s haunches swells.

Hissing rises from the yard below–
a meeting of creatures,
who knows what,
swathed in dark.
The owl is quiet now,
so the dog and I wait in the silence
for his swinging song to begin again.

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On the back patio,
my cat shakes a mouse between her jaws
and snaps his front leg between her teeth.
She bats him into the air four sharp, humiliating times
then leaves him
to drag himself away

through a crack in our fence–
to find a warm and private place,
under some rock,
where he will curl inwards
and let his small body stiffen
and cool.

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There will always be
a warm and private place,
water too deep,
silence,
a door.

This is
all that we do not see—
all that we cannot see
to preserve what is tender
and what is sacred:

dew settling in the early morning
the wet and panting birth of a deer
the aspens, with their great dark eyes,
blinking at one another in the night.