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.

*****

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.

*****

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.

*****

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.

*****

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.