

LOONS

1.

The U-Haul neatly splits
their divorce—her possessions
in the back, his up front,

the baby's spread out
among father, mother,
and all the grandparents.

Unlike loons, humans
do not mate for life.
Out brains outweigh us.

In the quiet of evening,
we hear the loons
far away on dark water.

Their calls sharpen the night
as if the next word from anyone
could bring us all to tears.

I help my son
carry the last of the furniture
from the lake house.

We rope everything into place,
slam shut the truck door
and drive away.

2.

I measure cities by noise.
The largest roar and clatter
regardless of the hour

and nothing short of freakish
Nature can muffle them—
several feet of snow before dawn, perhaps.

I have sat on porch steps
to watch traffic in endless lines,
have smelled bus fumes and semis,

caught the language of people
in a hurry, mopped sweat
from the radiating, trapped heat.

I have waited in the midst
of thousands on six-lane
interstates blocked with wreckage,

felt the impatience, the hostility
take shape like a fried egg,
grease splattering on skin,

all of us annoyed with the dead
by the side of the road,
who block our progress.

A city is no place for the dead.
They are too slow, too quiet.
They ask too much of us.

3.

And what have I done
with my life? What
song can I sing out

across this dark water?
I have made of my life
a string of words

long enough
to reach the moon,
far short of the sun.

I lack the elegance
of a single loon
swimming through shadows

of white pine on water,
wailing to its family,
like a ship of solid bone.

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4.

Oh my children,
I would carry you
on my back forever,

but still you would
swim, dive into the water
deep as life itself

and leave me afloat
on this dark lake
calling your names

as if words alone
could enfold you
in feathery shields,

keep you safe from eagles,
from turtles,
from gulls.

But I cannot.
In spite of it all,
still I try another song,

another voice,
one more word
to the moon.