

## Long Drop to Black Water

What confidence led us into a rainy Ithaca night  
neither I nor my friend knew. Swollen gorges  
to our left, the ground crumbling  
as we clung to tree trunks and hooked our fingers  
into the tight loops of a gun factory fence,  
sleighting a path in spray and fog  
that swallowed our legs below the knees,  
not kowing till the next day's retracking  
how often we had hung, far from the eroded bank,  
above nothing but a long drop to black water.

Whatever that confidence was, I've lost it.  
But it informs the toads,  
crouches them in crooked caves of alder roots,  
pulses the pale skin under their slack mouths,  
keeps them in the pond's tight waves clutching anything:  
a pine's resinous knot, a fist of chair foam,  
even a drowned and legless female.

Now in the sun's last light, unctuous through haze  
that lifts the land above itself  
and leans the alders over water in green flames,  
I see more in the pasture's stubbed grass,  
leaping sure and unwavering to the cold,  
without thought of the ducks scouring the pond's edge  
for the mass of eggs  
or the snapper hungry on the gelid bottom.  
What could bring them year after year  
and always less in number  
but faith in their own wholeness and desire.  
Faith that I lack, faith that I want  
in this spring, fecund and feral.