ENTRY NUMBER 03: A ROUNDED BOWL

Robins splash in the driveway’s puddles.
They hop around mounds that moles have made,
fly with their mud-covered feet to places
where branches meet to form a solid seat.
In spring, they nest inside our pines.
Later, they leave summer heat behind
and rest high up in our maples.
When autumn winds blow, I sight their handiwork,
still standing strong.

For two straight summers, though, surprisingly,
they constructed a nest in the corner of our back porch trellis.
Opening our bathroom blind,
I had a bird’s eye view of their progress:
the expectant mother, carrying mud in her mouth,
spitting it out,
scraping her mud-splattered claws with her beak.
A potter, she shaped her sturdy mud bowl:
depth enough to hold several eggs—
depth and round and strong.
Her mate, ever watchful, offered up accessories:
dried plants, grasses, cellophane, and candy wrappers.
The soon-to-be mother wove the baby basket—
perfectly positioned.
Nights, while the cold spring rains poured down on the trellis,
fearing the worst, I cracked open the blind.
Her wings, flung over the nest, fluttered;
I felt like a voyeur. I, too, was waiting.
Remembering vivid pregnancy dreams . . .

Two months into the first I found myself in a burning building.
Terrified. Trying to find my child.
I screamed until flames seared my eyeballs.
Then I fled. Empty-handed.
When I woke, the dream covered me like ash.
My throat hurt.
I should have stayed in that building.
To dream such a thing felt like a sin.
Days later, shopping for my first maternity outfit,
I spotted and bled out the baby.

Eight months into my first live birth, another night vision
flooded through my walrus body.
I was swimming in an indoor pool.
Legs kicking, I gave birth to a son,
a glorious creature: half fish, half child.
His tail flashed through the water.
*Come to me!* I opened my arms.
We swam laps with each other.
I woke, covered in sweat,
ready to deliver.

From my bathroom perch, I wondered:
Do birds dream of birth?
Her feathers were thickly wet with rain.
She fanned eggs so beautifully colored
I came to understand why we name a paint after them:
robin’s egg blue.
When the babies hatched, the proud parents flew around furiously,
fetching wiggling worms for babies
all mouth: large and demanding;
blood red—a quivering opening
that called sharply, piteously.
I was transported, traveling a stretch of Missouri highway.
I slammed on the brakes, stopped on the shoulder.
Grabbing my squealing son,
I tore off my shirt and fed him.

I wanted them to stay in their nests.
I wanted to prevent them from fledging out and flying.
One day, with the mother gone, three babies flew away.
I watched the mother return, scan the vacant nest,
then settle on top of her last baby
until that one, too, flew away.
Shortly afterwards the mother left.
For what is the use of an empty nest?