

The Gasconade

—*for M*

We make Southern Missouri by dusk,
arrive at your river, park, & walk
along your shy, thin corpse.
I come to you by firefly tonight
to do what children do with mothers
and rivers: to take from you
without asking & have you pass
again from my life. You will not
remember that you are dead.
That your body & blood went bad
on alcohol & grief. But this is before
all that. Before recompense &
Lethe, & your final command
that we not do as you had
and carry it with us like a glacial pressure
and wound. This is what the dead know.
Do not tarry on the two miscarried &
the one child taken by fall. I will not so much
as whisper it in the eddy of your ear.
For I come to you now before that agony.
Even before I was born, when we met
in that neither space, when your heart
stopped for minutes during the final push.
As if you or I or something could not decide.
This time, it is before I existed, unless
we always are & were & will be again.
The river seems to imply. You may not
know me. But you will know my voice
because you live within it. It is before
your courtship with the boy, my father,
who would take you off the farm to Chicago
and Palo Alto, the unenvied edges
of the world. Before even the trip to Tulsa
or your wedding in the little Chetopa church
or your honeymoon at the Bob Cummings
Motor Lodge in Joplin. Before your sister
introduced you to the river that would change
your course. The transaction of rivers is
transactional. One becomes another.
They are less noun & more verb. Such that
the plate-on-plate New Madrid quake
caused the Mississippi to run backwards

for three days straight & reversed time.
I come to you now by broken light.
By the heather atop a field of wheat.
By the immortal moan of cicada.
By shadow of the co-op grain elevator.
By the last cow into the barn for milking.
By the kittens drowned in a burlap sack.
The little skip in your heart when you ran
too fast along the irrigation ditch.
That was you, or me, the voice inside you.
The Irish in the wind & the expanse
of the large that pares us down to seed
and lifts us into confluence. Though
I am doubtful you found peace,
frantic as you were in the letting
and the loss & cautious not to offend.
I want to tell you what your river says to me.
It boasts of nothing or grand nothingness.
Fanann muid. We wait.
Leanann muid ar aghaidh. We abide.

Bio:

Darren Morris has been awarded a fellowship by the Virginia Commission for the Arts. His poems can be found at *American Poetry Review*, *The Missouri Review*, *New England Review*, and *Poetry Ireland Review*.