

Descending

Bruce Campbell

My in-laws built this lake cottage "Up North" fifty years ago.
Standing at the shoreline alone, I catch sight of an osprey plummeting,
targeting a fish beneath the rippled surface.
Flared talons, expressionless eyes, tucked wings.
she crashes through feet-first and disappears. My breathing stops.

Perhaps my great-grandfather squinted from under cupped hands
as a white-tailed eagle dove on mackerel below the surface of a fjord.
He died a hundred and ten summers ago
leaving nothing of which I am aware except a wedding photo
and descendants like me.

A halo materializes as the osprey emerges.
She strips the water from her feathers in the slanting light.
Her empty talons flex; her wings thrum and grab the thick air.
Rising again, she lines up another brown trout
or perhaps, this time, a smallmouth.

The cottage has needs. Windowsills crumble; relationships falter.
We visit, patch, and nurture what we can, when we can.
The raptor calls. I run my toe over the worn flagstone and wonder if
my children's grandchildren will stand at this shoreline
transfixed by the distant progeny of *this* osprey and *this* fish.

Creative Wisconsin: the Wisconsin Writers Association Literary Journal (Wisconsin Writers Association Press), October 2016.