

The Posture of Ophelia

(amputated from Shakespeare. He does not own girls floating down creeks)

Emma Cameron

To float on your back, you must first inflate your belly.
To move you must first imitate a chicken, then the letter T, and finally a soldier.
Over and over, you must become the shape of these things.

How does a river drag a body? I have returned to report
that we are facedown. The stomach is the first to rise from the bottom of a lake.
The limbs and the head drape from the swollen torso like the shape
of a grazing bull, pitching his ears to the song of the goat
that screams when it is sacrificed.

When water replaced the air in my lungs,
I pictured that body hanging by the hooves. The start of its vertical life.
And as I sank, I ensured the wet wilting of every growing thing
you named: rosemary, pansy, fennel, columbine, rue, daisy, and violet
because they were beautiful and made up our girlhood

learning how to sit, how to talk, how to hold our body still
in its thin red cast.