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The Wild Ducks Floating

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THE WILD DUCKS FLOATING

The wild ducks floating
in the river now,
now diving under,
are Karl and William,
there to wash the homestead topsoil
from their plow-weary skin.
Their shouts and laughter in the warm air of evening
are like no other sounds on earth I know of,
their bodies from a distance
dipping like the swift white fundamentals of birds.

They say the lark
has only five notes he can sing,
and thus for age on age has sung them,
no question asked, no spread of scale,
no rash improvisation.
And though the ground we work
goes always up one row and down another,
we have the boundless gift
of human sound. Just listen to it, Anna,
no two syllables ever quite the same:
release in the throats of our boys,
in the throats of Karl and of William,
washing themselves
to be more of themselves
downstream.