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## While Canoeing the Red Lake River Near Goodridge Minnesota, We Speak of Direction

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# *While Canoeing the Red Lake River Near Goodridge, Minnesota, We Speak of Direction*

We speak of bent willow and goldenrod,  
the inevitability of downstream. We speak  
a language of airborne seeds, a delicate geometry  
floating over the plowed black clods.

Bubbles swirl past,  
sticky on the water. A fray of snarled weeds. The slow  
current catches us, swings us wide around  
into wild rice, nudges the bow against the soft bank.

When we speak, we speak of growth in wheat,  
flow in river. What is most abstract is between  
us. Our words tangle there, and scrape.

We leave bulrush  
and blue gentian, and continue drifting. The riverbottom  
rises and falls, its bristle-red weeds combing silence  
like a mollusk's foot. Looking down into the water,  
I wonder what is actually moving; we seem snagged  
while the weeds, unanchored, roll downstream.

Occasionally, a pile of beaver sticks, cleaned white,  
on the bottom. The large rodents have eaten  
what they needed to get through winter. I love their  
tangible efforts: the bare sticks, the mounded lodge,  
the woven dams. The half-cut popple  
notched to fall riverward.

Wheat and corn revolve around us.  
We think we are the center, that we have placed ourselves here.  
That because of us, brown mallards panic from cattails,  
that the rice surrounds us, rustling its ripe  
maroon heads against the canoe.

In this silver slot  
amid green, our abstractions are carried away by the water  
the way a hawk glides and turns, effortless  
over fallow fields. The way a lover, leaving,  
can imagine the same river many miles upstream  
and find it much more beautiful there.

*Todd Frederickson*