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Sleeping Sickness

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Sleeping Sickness

They've kept his overalls on a nail
in the back bedroom, his fishing pole on the porch.
They believe he lies in the hammock
between the willows, a blade of grass at his lips.
Not family, I see him near death
in the backwater shack, his pallet sheets soaked
with the heat of his body. His family croons
Emmett or Earl, a name he shares
with his daddy or granddaddy, a name
that rolls off their tongues like a lullaby.
I envy the intimacy of their sorrow, history
of stillborns and drownings.
No one in his family knows
to blame mosquitos, thick all week
in the places he played. Had I been there
when his body first quivered,
I would have grasped his shoulders
and insisted he wake up.
Like a dowser who finds water, I expect someday
to move paperweights without touching them, make radios
snap on.
When my father died, I said I would give up
writing to bring him back, and for awhile,

I believed resurrection could happen.
What sacrifice would this boy's family give?
What holds us here must hold others.