



Vicki Nyman

Duckling

The duckling limps, lurches hard to its left across oil-stained, vomit-stained, piss-stained cement. The drivers do not reduce their speed. Christ-like in its instinct, its faith, so to speak, that by continuing on this path through the parking ramp, it will reach—what? Water, Mother, feathered friends? This unwavering belief that, in spite of all evidence to the contrary, it is en route home is what humans call magical thinking.

I park my car in the first open space, then run through stinking stairwells first to the fourth, then third, then second floors of the ramp, calling, crooning, bending over double to try to see beneath the bodies of hundreds of vacated vehicles. Exhaust molests my nostrils and gut. I am late for the office. But I have to find this duckling. I live on five acres of wetland. Half of my front yard is a swamp. There are pines and white birch and apple trees beneath which it could rest and, possibly, heal. Cattails to offer it safety and shade.

What the hell is this days-old creature doing across the street from the Minneapolis Government Center, surrounded by the cars and trucks of civil servants and police officers? Of judges who habitually sentence other lost ones to confinement within structures formed, like this one, of concrete and steel and reinforced by iron bars. Iron laws. Inside which souls atrophy because, unlike this duck, they understand there is no escape.

The ramp is steeped in grime and garbage. Newspapers, Styrofoam cups, mangled foil wrap. Still-moist chewing gum. A condom, a toothbrush. Urine, urine everywhere. This detritus is the human equivalent of the clusters of down the duckling is molting. A refugee of our climate war, uprooted from its habitat and cursed to circle a stone labyrinth populated with inattentive drivers who don't see it or its desperation. Its life shed like a wake behind it.

Vicki Nyman is a reading tutor at an elementary school in the Minneapolis area. She studied Creative Writing as a graduate student at Hamline University and independently with poet Jim Moore. Her work has appeared in *Evening Street Review*, *The Remington Review*, *El Portal* and *Green Hills Literary Lantern*. Originally from Chicago, Vicki now lives on four acres in semi-rural Minnesota with her XXL puppy. She enjoys listening to classical music and Chapo Trap House.

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