



"Egret" Copyright 2000 Dancing Bear

## The White Birds

As soon as I learned I was confused about  
their identity, they went away.

The white birds might have been grown egrets—  
Common, yellow bills, orange when breeding,  
legs and feet black, larger, with nothing beyond  
beauty to distinguish them.

Snowy, sloping birds—  
a feathered kick pleat along a smaller back,  
flamboyance hiding a less eager neck.  
Or, immature herons, Little Blues,  
not yet colored by gravity and joy,  
black-billed, but not native to this highway.

I wanted to wish them foolishly Great Blues,  
an imaginary state of heron, of gray, of blue transparent,  
as deep as undiscovered sky,  
a daughter's eyes that people say are see-through.

It isn't clear.  
A person could die, a bird could fly away,  
that eroticism, that field of springs.  
This confusion would explain their ignorance—

the middle of the road is not a place for birds.  
The meridian only moves like the sea,  
waving with overturned station wagons,  
trash, skid marks even in that lush lap.

My field guide spells the names,  
Areda herodius and Casmerodius albus—  
explains that yellow stocking seams on young black legs,  
rising well above golden slippers,  
may fool at a distance  
an amateur like me—  
a woman on the verge of herself.

## Tenderness

He's an old man in hibiscus trunks,  
the whole corner of the pool flows and lingers  
like a Hawaiian lei as he joins us.  
His wake is wide, he measures more  
than two persons' worth of water,  
his head doesn't bob below the surface.  
The other swimmer and I never speak,  
we count and pace our cautious way  
around, like brother and sister.  
We were already slow, and envy  
his indifference to the sharper stroke,  
those sculptors in the faster lanes.

The old guy glides by.  
My cap pinches my hair, my goggles fog and leak.  
The younger man speeds up when he isn't ready  
and later has to wait.  
When the small leaves slosh in our faces,  
we brush them away.

Jennifer Swanton Brown

Jennifer Swanton Brown grew up in Palo Alto, California, where her first poem was published in a local newspaper when she was in the fifth grade. She has degrees in

Linguistics, German, and Nursing, and has worked in hospitals, a hospice, and for the medical device industry. Brown currently works with her husband in their technical and medical writing business. She has studied poetry for the last 20 years, but is just beginning to publish her work. She lives in Cupertino, California with her family.