**Prelude1 to Jumping in the River**

by Katia Grubisic

He unpeels himself, lays his light shirt, glasses, straw hat

and shoes on the sea-monster

driftwood, where they rest as easily

as they do on him. The mental preparation

takes some time. I have also stood

on that rock, feet cupping

the low, flat lip. The decision is not yet made.

What goes on at the edge of the bank

could last years, centuries. The bottom will shift

or vanish entirely, will prod

from the muck we can barely toe

deeply rooted lilies, suckling

bladderwort2. Its weight separating it

from the air, the water seeks

itself and stays there, closing

without fuss over whole worlds. It has swallowed

countless resolves to jump or retreat

and kept no record of either. Yet —

the pizzicato3 of the crickets, the stream — this is at stake,

and it remains enough to give us pause.

The exit, too, will be graceless. There are no footholds

among the reeds and we can barely heave

the body up. We are hopelessly terrestrial, and vaguely,

mnemonically4 aquatic, but never both at once. In the end,

I catch the aftermath: the slowing ripples, the dogs

rushing down the hill, the surprised head bobbling

above the water. Waiting, I have missed the jump,

the perfect, reckless moment when we cannot turn back.

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1 prelude: an introduction to a poem or piece of music

2 bladderwort: an aquatic plant

3 pizzicato: the sound made by plucking a stringed instrument

4 mnemonically: associated with a deep memory