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MARGARET ATWOOD

DEATH OF A YOUNG SON BY DROWNING

He, who navigated with success
the dangerous river of his own birth
once more set forth
on a voyage of discovery
into the land I floated on
but could not touch to claim.
His feet slid on the bank,
the currents took him;
he swirled with ice and trees in the swollen water
and plunged into distant regions,
his head a bathysphere;
through his eyes’ thin glass bubbles
he looked out, reckless adventurer
on a landscape stranger than Uranus
we have all been to and some remember.
There was an accident; the air locked,
he was hung in the river like a heart.
They retrieved the swamped body,
cairn of my plans and future charts,
with poles and hooks
from among the nudging logs.
It was spring, the sun kept shining, the new grass
leapt to solidity;
my hands glistened with details.
After the long trip I was tired of waves.
My foot hit rock. The dreamed sails
collapsed, ragged.
I planted him in this country
like a flag.