

How To Size a Ring

by Denise Ortiz

My great-aunt used to say
the creek is wife
to the floodplain
He resizes her ring
every quarter century
or whenever she grows
or shrinks

At the 10-year flood stage
she was fish-freckled and narrow-hipped
birthmarked by a skinny-legged blue heron
she wore wading killdeer on her sides
and lost leather shoes
she jogged around boulders
to stay thin
so overwhelming the bridge of his nose in spring
he gave her a ring-necked pheasant
under an aspen honeymoon

At the 25-year stage
the time of sensual twists and turns
she stored muskrat dens in her stony pelvis
saved rusty bikes, mattress springs
couches and cars
fed thirsty cows and new frogs
furnished her wideness with drift twigs of hawthorn
drove flat moles home, scurrying down her flanks like pennies
she hid duck eggs for Easter
taught toddling baby willows
how to pet playful dogwoods

At 35 years
she changes her channel
sun-bakes a magpie
fills cavities with tree swallows
throws brushy parties for the poplar
in honor of the ladyslipper orchid
serves snowberries to neighbor rabbits
owls to the dusk
scrapes by the yellow pine like a black grass serpent
flowing through seasonal moods
sometimes vomiting wastewater
then hosting meetings for beauty and depth

through pauses of dove and kestrel
periods of bulldozing
the post-fight silence of winter freezes
always rebuilding herself
yet still the same long-fingered girl
he bordered all along.
He tolerates every cramp and gain
beckoning deer to her thighs
singing to her like the meadowlark
giving her space.

At 100 years
she sometimes still swells wide
or contracts
eroding him, shaping him
then pulling back
Of Course her lids brim over
as all eyes must
at times
But his job is to hold her
to provide her a crease
for her release
protect her from shops and streets
with arms
edges, banks, buttes
expansive as fields of wheat
or close as cat-tailed ridges
spooning her in the daily afternoon nap
they have been taking
for thousands and thousands
of years.