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# Waiting for Lesser Duckweed: On a Proposal of Issa's

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## Two Poems · *Sandra McPherson*

### WAITING FOR LESSER DUCKWEED: ON A PROPOSAL OF ISSA'S

December, a weekday,  
no one else crossing  
    (by way of the wet path)

the bird sanctuary's yellow  
spongy bottomland,  
    no duckweed

any longer willow-green—  
for now, the almost smoldering  
    gas-lacy water says,

it's down making turions.  
The way to be introduced to it  
    is first

to meet nothing. In rain,  
a thin microscope-specimen rain.  
    One raises a face

to flooded sketchlike  
territories of trees,  
    sepia, seeping;

to blunt, upward bluffs of ivy,  
bared poison oak;  
    a soaking place,

fed by springs and floods,  
shallow water table  
    strained by willows.

In spring, in a more forward month,  
yellow-red willow-bud husks  
will sharpen the trail,

their old pen tips,  
oleo-spot gulls' beaks,  
brighten the flat brown pond,

and a man with a knife,  
whack, whack,  
righthanded down the path,

will kill new twigs too new  
yet to be woody.  
But there's

no duckweed until the summer  
when finally where a creek  
swims in,

there's duckweed  
barely tugging  
the moss-strandy bottom,

wheatcolored  
seed-shrimps  
touring in and around

the barbless roots,  
hyaline drag-lines,  
where a mud-smooth leech adjusts

and tows  
the duckweed a bit.  
Some places it bunches,

simple but chained,  
a soft hauberk on the stream.  
Some places it wrinkles,

a basilisk's back.  
It is utterly simple  
and multiple.

It is floating,  
one of many rafts.  
The water here is cold,

fresh, still  
and hard. Ovals, ovals.  
"Let's take the duckweed way

to clouds,"  
said Issa. Let's take it  
when it comes to us,

its leaf  
not called a leaf,  
diameter for which there is no term

but green;  
let's follow  
the least weed up

to nimbus  
however many  
steps it takes,

late in the day's  
rootless endurance  
to make much progress

the duckweed way.  
Let us grow and wane  
with this ideal, the way

it keeps the single petal  
of its bloom confidential  
in a hollow on its side.

*Lemna minor*

*with thanks to Lucien Stryk,  
who translated*

## ARTISTS

1

Hip calls

“Take out your false teeth, Mama,  
Let Daddy suck your gums”

a word—

“It was already a word  
and I just wrote the rest of the song.”

Fish skeletons in his van’s wastebasket  
might be going  
to be a word. They are almost teeth,  
they have been sucked clean.