

White pelicans

by [Sarah Rossiter](#) in the [March 23, 2022](#) issue

One early spring in Illinois,
startled by the foreign sight
of pelicans upon dark water,
we stopped to stare, my mother
and I, at such ungainly awkward
birds—the males with their red-
knobbed bills, flat drooping sacks
of wrinkled skin—watching as
they took to flight, laborious,
a clumsy sight, until, airborne,
they were transformed.

And we, amazed, lay side by side
—though never touching, no, not that—
on soft new grass as feathered white
in dazzled light, they danced for us,
they soared and swung, angelic host,
they flew as one, a grace-filled
weaving in and out.

It's winter now, black branches stark,
my mother felled—a sudden stroke—
she sits, stiff-limbed, upon the bed.
I kneel to dress her. Socks, shoes, bra.
She lifts her arms as if to fly.
Her skin is soft. My fingers dance.
Does she remember what we saw?
Will she remember how we touch?