

## Door to the River

by [Marjorie Stelmach](#) in the [April 2025](#) issue

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*After the painting by Willem de Kooning*

Imagine a door. Now, remove the attachments—  
the hinges and knobs—extract the word *wooden*

like a splinter from your heel, and there you have it:  
wide open, all yours. Pretend you're Huck Finn

fleeing Pap's shack, lighting out for the river.  
There, on the bank, mud-footed as an otter,

simply slip through the surface. See? Not a ripple.  
You *can* swim, can't you? If not, or if you fear

the cold, or if you've been told the currents here  
are treacherous, you'll find a raft half-hidden

in the tall river grasses. It's sturdy, river-worthy.  
Like shavings of sunlight afloat on the water,

this raft can never sink. Climb aboard, push off.  
As the day heats up, ease into the cool. The river

will hold you like a hammock roped at one end  
to the ocean, at the other, to the upstream sky.

Lean back. Close your eyes. What you hear  
is the purl of a paddlewheel lifting

slices of water and setting them down again  
as softly as time's passing. And yes, time is passing.

Soon you'll be leaving, but don't be concerned,  
the leaving is easy. Imagine a doorway.

Now, remove your attachments . . .